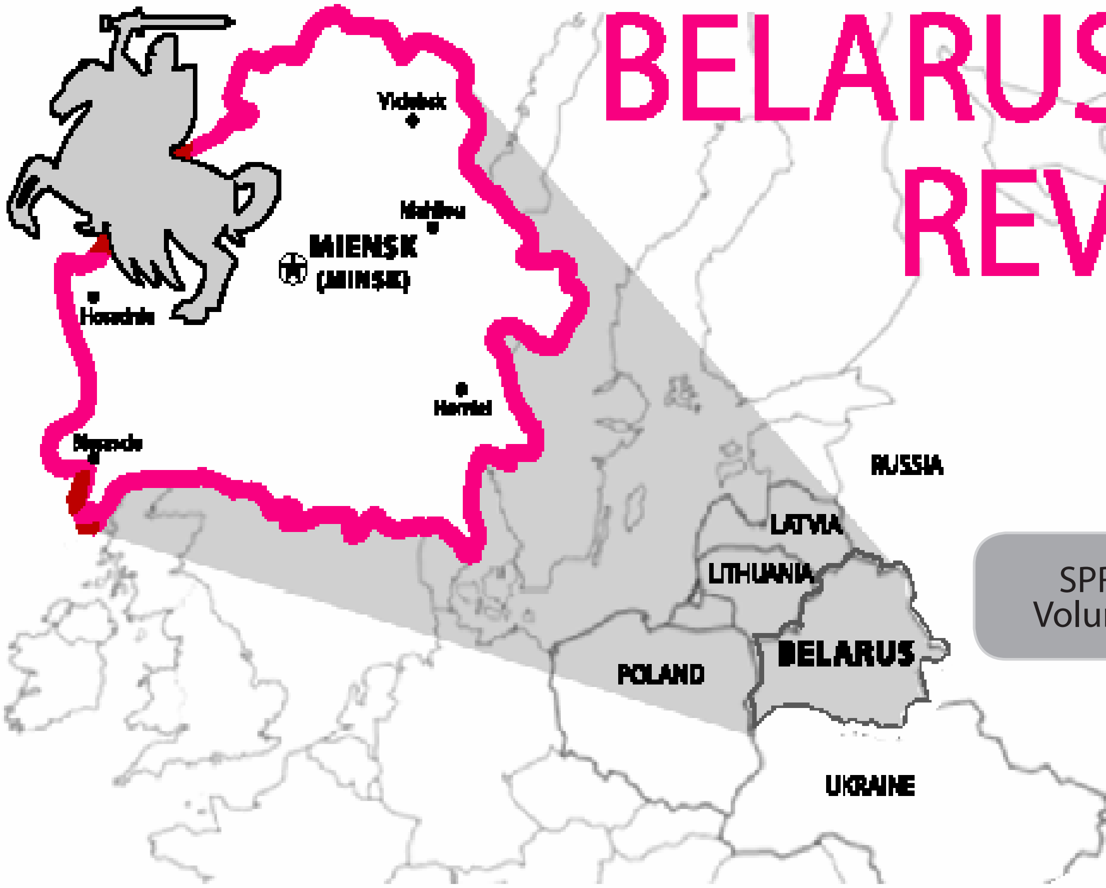
BELARUSIAN REVIEW



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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

MY MOTHERLAND IS IN MY SOUL

ZINA GIMPELEVICH

My motherland is in my soul. Do you understand?
I come here without an entrance visa.
When I am lonely, she sees to it:
She tucks me into bed, as mothers do.
Marc Chagall

Belarusian athletes surprised the world by winning five gold medals and one bronze at the Olympics in late February 2014. Belaruś left Poland, Great Britain, Australia, and many other countries with more substantial reputation in politics, economy, and culture in the dust. So who is Belaruś? Most of the world does not know much about this country, its complex history, and great literature. In fact, the literature describes the lives of people with diverse origins, ethnicities, faiths, and cultures.

The ethnic and religious proportions of these distinct Belarusian groups have changed over time, but Jews have been the largest minority for over seven centuries on historical Belarusian lands until late 1970s. Furthermore, Belaruś is the only country in the world where Yiddish was one of its state languages (1919-1938). Nevertheless, and unlike its Polish, Ukrainian, and, in particular, Russian literary counterparts, the portrayal of the Jew in Belarusian literature has not been sufficiently investigated. For example, there exist three scholarly journals dedicated to the literary, cultural, and historical relations of Christian and Jewish Poles: Polin (published in the UK and the USA), Gal-ed (Israel), and Kwaltalnik Historii Żydów (Poland). The 2006 topical monograph by Joanna Beata Michlic, Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present, ponders related questions. As for Ukrainian literature, Myroslav Shkandrij's well-researched and thoughtful monograph, Jews in Ukrainian Literature: Representation and Identity (2009), did justice to the subject matter. The vast scholarly works which exist about Russian Jews is crowned by Henrietta Mondry's, Exemplary Bodies: Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture since the 1880s (2009).

Jewish economic and cultural presence in the Belarusian territories has been well documented, though never popularized. During their long, rich social and cultural history in Belaruś, Jews had experienced great losses. In particular, these occurred during the seventeenth century "Silent War," the Soviet-Polish war (1918-1921), and during the Holocaust with over 800,000 dead. All of this is amply represented in Belarusian and Belarusian-Jewish literature. Despite the wealth of documents, poems, memoirs, stories, and novels about Belarusian Jews and/or literature with Jewish characters, particularly from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, very little scholarly attention has been given to this subject. The only existing work in English that does address Belarusian literature dealing with Jewish protagonists is a monograph co-written by the late Vera Rich and Jakub Blum, The Image of the Jew in Soviet Literature: Post-Stalin Period (1984). Rich's part of the monograph, "Jewish Themes and Characters in Belorussian Texts," limits itself to literature produced about WWII, concentrating on a very short period in Belarusian Soviet Literature. It is noteworthy that Rich's conclusions are substantially different from Blum's in that they demonstrate that generally speaking, Belarusian Soviet literature (unlike Russian) often "shows considerable sympathy for their Jewish characters, and this sympathy is reflected in the very considerable help extended to them by the Belarusian heroes of these tales."

My study in progress, entitled "The Portrayal of Jews in Modern Belarusian Literature," intends to query these gaps, since Belarusian literature is one of the most plentiful sources of information for understanding the achievements and interactions of Belarusian, Jewish, and other historical cultures in the area. Indeed, I have collected close to two hundred titles written by Belarusian authors who fully included Belarusian Jewish characters into their works. Due to space constraints, the material that is actually used in the forthcoming monograph is ten times less compared to the initial collection. However, and unexpectedly to the author of the forthcoming monograph, these literary works of Belarusian writers of various times and styles are very close in spirit because of their representation of their Jewish characters not as foreign but as entirely native.

Yet it is generally and wrongly believed that, despite constant and productive economic arrangements, Belarusian and Jewish life seemed to be isolated and estranged culturally and socially until the second half of the nineteenth century. This position, concocted by tsarist and Soviet historiography, is not true. Even in the fifteenth century, Belarusian and Jewish intellectual relations were productive, diverse, and rich.

This notion of Belarusian distinctiveness is confirmed by the research of the well-known Russian/Belarusian journalist Alexander Stupnikov. In an interview regarding his movie Izgoi [Outcasts, 2008/9]" about the Jewish Partisan movement in Eastern Europe, he states: "Belaruś was the only country among all the other countries of Eastern Europe where Germans were impotent in forcing the locals to participate in local pogroms; therefore the Germans started the annihilation [of Belarusian Jews] themselves using the help of punitive German-sponsored groups from neighboring countries [mainly the Ukraine and Estonia]." This claim to exempt Belarusians from the "collective guilt" of the Holocaust is well recorded in Belarusian literature. Certainly the mood, background, quality, and genres of this literature vary, relying on and reflecting the socio-political and economic conditions of the country at the moment of writing. Furthermore, if Belarusian intellectuals of Christian origin were eager to study Yiddish and /or Hebrew in the 1990s and during the first few years of the twenty-first century, this tendency drastically changed following the presidential elections of 2006. Currently, most Belarusians are often indifferent to or even irritable about the Jewish past of

their common Belarusian history. This is the outcome of the current suffocating intellectual and economic atmosphere in the country, where history books are full of omissions, false interpretations, and marginal relevance to the subject matter.

Though endemic anti-Semitism was comparatively minor in historic Belaruś and flourished fully only during Soviet times, this transformation of attitude is not so apparent in present-day Belaruś, where authorities have surrounded Belarusian Jewish history with dead silence. Belarusian academics trying to pursue Jewish studies (common history, linguistic versatility and communality, the Holocaust, and other related subjects) are jobless. These factors have resulted in younger Belarusians being generally ignorant and indifferent to that part of their country's history. All of this is truly sad because Belarusians have inherited humanity's highest trophy from their forefathers: a combination of racial tolerance, love, and understanding for their neighbors of different faiths and ethnicities. Hopefully, this part of their history will be remembered, respected, and honored someday; there are tantalizing possibilities that Belarusian amnesia about the country's Jewish past will be healed.

After long neglect, Belarusian fate and culture is finally achieving the recognition it deserves among scholars of history and social sciences. The last two decades in particular have seen a sharp increase in the number and quality of books and articles produced about Belaruś on both sides of the ocean. This scholarship is emerging mainly from historians, but solid research is also appearing in other disciplines. Western historians have been particularly prolific, with projects that include David Marples's seminal manuscript Belaruś: A Denationalized Nation (1999) and Timothy Snyder's The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belaruś, 1569-1999 (2003). Moscow-based art critic Aleksandra Shatskikh completed the excellent study, Vitebsk: The Life of Art (2007). This is a convincing example that inspects the remarkable influence of Belarusian Jewish artists and philosophers on the development of the visual arts and culture in Europe and North America before and beyond the two world wars. Elissa Bemporad's excellent book, Becoming Soviet Jews, is a case study of Minsk during the interwar period. Her work follows in the footsteps of other worthy micro-historians of the area: Rebecca Kobrin, Leonid Smilovitsky and Arkadii Zeltser also concentrate on historic Belaruś. A history of Yiddishland was recently crowned by the solid academic volume, Transformatsiia Mestechek Sovetskoi Belorussii (1918—1939) by Andrey Zamoisky. Based on thorough research, this analysis does not idealize the Jewish situation in Belaruś during its Sovietization.

The Jewish experience of communal life in Belaruś during WWII has also garnered considerable interest among Western scholars and cultural figures. A meticulously researched manuscript by historian and sociologist Professor Nechama Tec, Defiance: The Bielski Partisans (1993), was followed by an eponymously titled movie based on Tec's work (Zwieg, 2009). Dr. Tec's manuscript includes an examination of a number of reliable documentary sources, scholarly works, and memoirs of that time in Belaruś. In Professor Timothy Snyder's topical article, "Holocaust: The Ignored Reality," this highly esteemed academic describes a number of criminal actions undertaken in Belaruś by the Nazi and Soviets. Timothy Snyder puts Belarus back on the European map during WWII in a separate chapter and throughout his monograph, The Bloodlands, of 2010 by underlining the following situation: "Belaruś was the center of Soviet-Nazi confrontation, and no country endured more hardship under German occupation."

Moreover, Belarusian writers continued to commemorate Jewish resistance and death during WWII despite a rather cold socio-political climate, even before Perestroika. A good example is Janka Bryl, whose memoirs are part of the study. Bryl also depicts a 1943 Jewish rebellion in Sabibor's concentration camp and connects his narrative with the Belarusian Jewish Holocaust. This story defies the common perception that Jews were meeting their deaths like obedient cattle. Right after perestroika, many Belarusian writers remembered the "golden" years before revolutions, wars, and Soviet rule, when their forefathers' peaceful and productive cohabitation with Belarusian Jews was a way of life. Meanwhile, the enigma of Jewish Belarusian attachment and wistfulness towards their forefathers' country still remains. This sentiment goes hand in hand with the nostalgia of many well-educated Belarusians. The answers to this phenomenon can only be found in a careful study of the livelihoods and literary histories of Christian and Jewish Belarusians.

And yet, despite the present lack of attention in Belarusian academic studies on this subject matter, countless Belarusians of many faiths are truly interested in their past relationships. This nostalgia, of course, is not "what it used to be," and is often manifested in unexpected and modern form. Alexander Rybak's victory at Eurovision 2009 and his great popularity since is often attributed to a huge lobby organized by former Belarusians, mainly Jewish residents of Europe, Israel, and USA.

Belarusian literature, unlike most of the Belarusian academic studies, has always used the image and character of the Jew throughout the centuries as a natural part of its discourse. Doubtlessly, one of the main motifs echoes Chagall's poems: nostalgia. But not only that; no less important is the motif of truth-telling about Belarusian Jews and their livelihood, and that of bringing down all the tsarists, Soviet, and Nazi propaganda machines that have attacked Belarusians of all faiths and ethnicities for centuries. Belarusian literature stands tall in this respect, and reminds one of an elderly couple on the eve of one of the spouses departing to a better world. Simultaneously, and independent of each other, these two people suddenly realize that though it seemed they were often "together alone" due to socio-political circumstances that evoked arguments, misunderstandings, rivalry, and even an occasional betrayal, they were each other's dearest and closest.

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CONCEPT OF THE ISSUE

The first 2014 issue of *Belarusian Review* is emerging when the post-Soviet space has received overwhelming international attention due to the conflict between two Belarus' neighbors, Russia and Ukraine, and annexation of the Crimea from the latter by the former. The development of these events has been triggered by the evolution of protests in Ukraine that started in November 2013 as a reaction to the decision of the Ukrainian authorities to postpone signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Belarus was not been directly involved, but nevertheless was directly affected by the situation in Ukraine. Regardless of the outcome in Ukraine and its numerous interpretations by various commentators – one thing is evident and should be stressed again. What has happened starting from the end of November 2013 in Kyiv and other regions of Ukraine was directly linked to the decision of the Ukrainian authorities not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and thus directly refer to the format of the Eastern Partnership Initiative which serves as format of the EU relations with the region to which Belarus belongs. Thus, the aftermath of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and the crisis in Ukraine constitute the first thematic bloc of this issue of *Belarusian Review.*

In his article *Belarus – EU: how to deal with the outsider?* Kiryl Kascian develops arguments presented in the editorial *Belarus: a second-tier partner of the EU?* by Kiryl Kascian and Hanna Vasilevich from the previous issue of *Belarusian Review* (vol. 25, issue 4) emphasizing that the secondary Belarusian position within the Eastern Partnership framework has been erroneously interpreted as an argument for Belarus to have no other choice than to be under the influence of Putin's Russia.

It is followed by an article *The Eastern Partnership after Vilnius* by Kiryl Kascian and Hanna Vasilevich which is a reply to an article entitled *Lessons from Vilnius* from *New Eastern Europe* (No. 1, 2014) by two Lithuanian political analysts, Laurynas Kasčiūnas and Vytautas Keršanskas.

In his article *Love Enforcement or Why Eastern Partnership Initiative Needs an Update* David Erkomaishvili argues that despite difference in their efforts while dealing with Ukraine, both EU and Russia have one element in common – both sides try to enforce their stance by all possible means.

Professor David Marples in his text *Belarus and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict* discusses policies of official Minsk in the conflict between Belarus' two largest neighbors.

The second block of this issue is focused on Belarusian Jews. There are many prominent world-known personalities of Jewish ethnicity born in Belarus such as Marc Chagall, Chaim Weizmann, Menachem Begin, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, Irving Berlin, Michael Marks and many more. For centuries Jews has formed an important and unalienable part of the society in Belarus and which is worth studying in its all diversity. This issue begins with the editorial by Professor Zina Gimpelevich *My Motherland Is in My Soul.* Among other things, Professor Gimpelevich emphasizes that "*Belarusian literature, unlike most Belarusian academic studies, has always used the image and character of the Jew throughout the centuries as a natural part of its discourse.*".

In this issue we also publish the first part of the study by Professor Leonid Smilovitsky entitled *Nazi Crimes in the USSR as Described in the WWII Letters, Diaries and Memoirs of Natives of Belarus.* The text is based on a collection of military letters and sources of personal origin collected within the project "Unclaimed memory" at the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University. The second part of this study will appear in the next issue of *Belarusian Review* (vol. 26, issue 2).

Another text by Professor Smilovitsky introduces the new book *Memory and Time.* The reader gets acquainted with recollections and testimonies of Holocaust witnesses and members of their families, participants of armed resistance. The book was prepared on the eve of the tragic date – the 70th anniversary of the destruction of the Minsk ghetto. It is therefore a tribute to the perished and the worry about current generations.

This issue contains a text in a series of three texts by Curt Woolhiser on the issue of bilingualism in Belarus that we began in the previous issue. The article offered our readers is entitled *Official bilingualism in Belarus falls far short of functional equality for Belarusian and Russian.*

A well known Belarusian historian Aleś Kraŭcevič provides his vision on how important can be the celebration of such historical events as the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Vorša on the state level and how the declaration of 2014 the Year of the Battle of Vorša in Lithuania may affect Belarusian-Lithuanian relations in the sphere of history.

Andrzej Tichomirow in his article *On the Imaginary Geography of the Belarusian Humanities* discusses transformations that Belarusian humanities have undergone during the last 20 years focusing on the"imaginary geography" of Belarus.

In his text *Belarus and Its Metaphors,* Brendan McCall provides the readers some insights of the project *The Belarusian Dream Theater.*

In this issue *Belarusian Review* continues focusing on the current state of Belarusian studies in various countries. The previous issue contains contributions by Virginie Symaniec and Ēriks Jēkabsons on Belarusian studies in France and Latvia respectively. In this issue Belarusian Review asks two scholars from Sweden (Andrej Kotljarchuk and Jakub Święcicki) and one from Norway (Martin Paulsen) to provide their vision of the current state of Belarusian studies in their countries.

Finally, David Marples in his exclusive interview introduces his new book to our reades. The book is entitled *"Our Glorious Past": Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2014). Professor David R. Marples examines how of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime has used the Great Patriotic War as a key element in the formation of ideology

We would also like to introduce our readers our new Advisory Board which currently consists of the following experts: *Vitaŭt Kipiel, Andrej Kotljarchuk, David Marples, Leonid Smilovitsky, Maria Paula Survilla, Zachar Šybieka, Virginie Symaniec, Curt Woolhiser,* and *Jan Zaprudnik.*

We would appreciate feedbacks and comments on any Belarus-related topic from our readers. We are open for cooperation with new authors.

FEATURES

BELARUS – EU: HOW TO DEAL WITH THE OUTSIDER?

KIRYL KASCIAN

In the editorial to the recent issue of Belarusian Review (vol. 25, issue 4), Hanna Vasilevich and I argue that Belarus remains in the "second tier" of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP). This secondary Belarusian position has been erroneously interpreted as an argument for Belarus to have no other choice than to be under the influence of Putin's Russia.

Belarus-EU relations can and should be measured through the prism of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative because they are conducted within its framework with all related peculiarities. Within the EU perspective, Belarus is an outsider even in the "second tier" of the Eastern Partnership. The main measurement in this situation is the stance of each EaP country towards negotiating, initiating, and signing of the association agreements, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade part, since these agreements in the view of the EU are to provide a detailed framework and guidelines for the significant range of political, economic, and social reforms in each country of the EU Eastern Neighbourhood. To demonstrate the current peripheral status of Belarus it is enough to refer to the Programme of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Programme substantially covers the issue of Eastern Partnership which is referred to as "one of the key priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency." At the same time, Belarus remains the only country among the EU Eastern Partners that is not specifically mentioned in the Programme. All the other five countries are measured through the prism of their progress in negotiating association agreements, including Azerbaijan, "tangible progress" in negotiations with which was expected.

Thus, although Lithuania remains one of the most active advocates in the EU for further developing relations with the Eastern Partnership countries and despite the agenda of the Lithuanian Presidency, which put the EU-EaP relations among its priorities, it is clear that the EU has neither expected anything from Belarus, nor had any strategy toward it. Hence, Belarus-EU relations within the context of the Lithuanian Presidency can be described as ad hoc actions that were at best planned for the short term.

This situation has three dimensions. First, it seems that the EU got used to the current status quo in its relations with Belarus. Second, should any significant political changes in Belarus ever happen, the EU seems to lack any well-developed strategy in its relations with this eastern neighbour. Third, in a situation where the Eastern Partnership appears among EU priorities only if one of the committed states (such as Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, or Sweden) takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, it is very likely that the EU would not be able to react swiftly and effectively to comprehensively support changes in Belarus and prove its status as an important player in the EaP region.

Belarus' (and others EaP countries') geopolitical location is mainly seen through the prism of geopolitical rivalry between the EU and Russia. Recent events in Ukraine (after its authorities decided to postpone signing the EU-Ukraine association agreement), Armenia (decision to join the Customs Union) and Moldova (decision of the Transnistrian authorities to adopt Russian legislation and recognize its supremacy) have not only proven the effectiveness of Russian foreign policy but confirmed the incapability of the EU to respond promptly to the situation and effectively to counterbalance Russian endeavours to engage these countries.

In practice it means that in order not to lose momentum the EU should reframe its policies towards its Eastern Neighbourhood, which would also require significant changes of its attitudes. This EU "reality self-check" should be based on the principle that the Union should not see itself as an "elite club," since this approach results in the overestimation of actual possibilities and negatively affects its policies. The primary focus of the new policies should be concentrated on the actual promotion of freedom of movement and people-to-people contacts, including real liberalization of the EU visa regime with the Eastern Partners. Thus, it is the EU itself that should first undertake measures in this field to become more open to the societies of its eastern neighbours regardless of the nature and agenda of its domestic political regimes. Already in a mid-term perspective, these measures might potentially enhance the level of political cooperation and this natural process could intensify rapprochement between the EU and its eastern neighbours.

Note: this article first appeared in http://belaruspoliticsdotcom.wordpress.com.

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THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AFTER VILNIUS

KIRYL KASCIAN AND HANNA VASILEVICH

The recent issue of the journal "New Eastern Europe" (No. 1, 2014) opens with an article entitled "Lessons from Vilnius" (pp. 8-13) by two Lithuanian political analysts – Laurynas Kasčiūnas and Vytautas Keršanskas. The authors focus on the outcomes of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and argue that this event "must be seen as an opportunity to review the goals of Europe's policy in the region." The article's content, which indeed deserves attention, need not be reproduced here but there are some statements made by the authors that require closer attention.

As the authors argue, so far "the [EaP] policy has been understood as *the spread of European values and norms in the neighbourhood* (italized by KK and HV). But cases of Ukraine and Armenia show that *competing integration projects* could further reduce the EU's abilities to tie neighboring states to Europe." Moreover, "the Vilnius Summit was *neither a victory nor a failure for the European Union's Eastern Partnership policy.* It is *an important milestone because the original mission to give a European perspective to the region has been accomplished."*

These four highlighted statements rather characterize the EU-centric vision of the EaP perspectives, which will be reflected in this text.

COMPETING INITIATIVES?

The EU (and its Eastern Partnership Initiative) and the Russian-driven Customs Union are presented as competing integration projects. From the article by Kasčiūnas and Keršanskas, it is not very clear what is actually competing with the Customs Union – the EU itself or its Eastern Partnership Initiative (EU-EaP). Regardless of this unclear formulation, their statement about competitiveness has reasonably and sufficiently been proven by the developments of the situation in Armenia, Moldova, and particularly Ukraine prior to the Vilnius Summit. Apparently, competitiveness denotes a certain symmetry. Nonetheless, the comparison of the EU and the Customs Union models proves to be asymmetrical at least in the third dimension.

First, there is a counterbalance in the EU by at least three countries (Germany, France, and the UK) to prevent domination by one state. In case of the Customs Union, it is Russia, which in any case would dominate it. Second, while the Russia's offer implies full and quite comprehensive membership in the Customs Union with the possibility of some influence in the decision-making process, the EU so far has never clearly indicated a membership perspective to at least one of six EaP countries, even though, as Kasčiūnas and Keršanskas rightfully stress, "Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty, which stated that any European state may apply to become a member of the Union, was adopted in the Association Agreement with Moldova."

Consequently, it implies a third dimension – a virtual EU integration vs. real cooperation with Russia. It is often embodied in various opinion push polls conducted throughout the EaP countries on geopolitical choices of their population between Russia/Customs Union and the EU (like the one by the IISEPS in Belarus). The EU option in these polls is usually referred to as "joining the EU." However, do such opinion polls matter at all if in their essence they compare a virtual situation with a real one?

This has two outcomes. First, if the country starts a certain integration process, it should be aware of its consequences. With the Customs Union it is clear from the very beginning, while in case of the European integration of the EaP countries the final outcome/benefit of it is still unclear. Should it indicate membership, it has to be declared at the beginning; otherwise it is a nearly never-ending maze with numerous obstacles.

Second, it is the self-perception of the Customs Union and the EU. The Russian approach can be described as that of "the rich older brother," as it implies a central Russian role in the design of its integration project and readiness to work here and now. In its turn, the EU approach can be characterized as "the high society club," which means that in order to get full access to it, a prospective candidate has to reach a certain status first and then the decision on accession can be made. This self-perception of the EU combined with the lack of clear membership perspective for the EaP countries largely complicates what is referred to as "*a European perspective to the region*."

FAILURE OF A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE?

A European perspective commonly means rapprochement with the EU, which ultimately should be accomplished by a EU membership. However, following the logic of Kasčiūnas and Keršanskas, who argue that Vilnius Summit signified "*an important milestone because the original mission to give a European perspective to the region has been accomplished*," it is possible to assume that for e EaP countries the European perspective is measured through their progress towards the Association Agreements with the EU and compliance with the formula "deeper integration – higher conditionality."

Apparently, it means that the EU prefers to engage with those EaP countries that have achieved certain progress rather than pulling up outsiders. At the same time, the batch of "leaders" has become limited to three countries at the top – Georgia, Moldova, and still Ukraine. The first two have initiated their Association Agreements with the EU, while Ukraine despite the decision to postpone signing it already has the initiated Agreement. For the remaining three countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus – the conclusion of such an agreement in the format proposed by the EU due to different reasons has proven to be not the most attractive option.

However, the issue of frozen conflicts needs to be taken into account. First, Georgia and Moldova do not control their entire territories, while their breakaway regions are subject to direct Russian involvement. However, while Georgia in 2008 has received a "vaccination" against Russian integration projects and can likely become the first country to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, the situation of Moldova is more vulnerable. Its regions of Transnistria and Gagauzia declared their

"pro-Russian" geopolitical priorities already after the initiation of Moldova-EU Association Agreement in Vilnius and the government in Chisinau has to handle it, since further rapprochement towards the European perspective could mean an end of Moldova's territorial integrity and/or its sovereignty.

The situation in Ukraine is currently far from being predictable even in a short-term perspective, but the events around the Euromaidan have proven the EU's inability to act swiftly and efficiently under the pressure of significant changes in an EaP country. To sum up, while having failed to engage the three countries in its current EaP format, the EU most likely would have difficulties in engaging at least two more. Isn't it *a failure* or at least a deadlock *for the European Union's Eastern Partnership within its current framework*? The aforementioned conditionality, which serves as a key concept for the EaP combined with the essence of the EU offer and inability to swiftly provide an efficient counterbalance for its EaP partners in case of prompt changes of the situation, have largely contributed to the current EaP outcome.

IS THERE A DURABLE SOLUTION?

It has become obvious, that the EaP in its current shape has failed. At the same time, the development of mutually beneficial relations between the EU on the one hand and the EaP countries on the other is beyond any doubt an issue of common interest. There are a number of reasons for this failure. First, the incentives provided by the EU were at least insufficient both for the EaP states and for their societies. With regard to the former, this refers to the lack of clear membership perspective for the EaP countries. With regard to the latter, it is the issue of the maintenance of visa-free regime between the EU and the EaP countries, which could have facilitated people-to-people contacts.

Second, the EU proved its inability to make decisions rapidly, aimed at qualitative support of its interests in the EaP countries. It also pertains to the EU's inability to counterbalance the growing Russian influence in the region.

Third, the EaP itself since its implementation in 2009 has never become a priority of the entire Union and became a focal point only when some of the Member States whose interests lay directly within the EaP area took presidency in the Council of the European Union.

And finally, the most problematic issue derived from the application of the conditionality principle, with the result that the EaP merely resembled a road of just one party towards "a club membership" instead of mutual rapprochement. In other words, it is a partner country that makes efforts to meet the EU standards. Thus, the first and foremost matter to change the negative dynamics is for the EU to reexamine its formal and inflexible approach towards its Eastern neighborhood and after such re-thinking to take efforts to maintain a mutual rapprochement on a durable basis.

Note: this article first appeared in http://belaruspoliticsdot-com.wordpress.com.

LOVE ENFORCEMENT OR WHY EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE NEEDS AN UPDATE

DAVID ERKOMAISHVILI

Neither the EU, nor Russia are prepared to deal with a strong, independent, and powerful Ukraine. Their efforts are different, but one element which they have in common, is that both sides try to enforce their stance by all possible means. Such a policy looks like love enforcement; unnatural and destructive.

One point, which is frequently overlooked in reference to the so-called 'Euro revolution,'- a series of violent and bloody events in Kiev that led to the fall of autocratic and a rampantly corrupt Yanukovych government, was triggered by the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative (EPI). The signing of the Association Agreement, which was planned as a pinnacle of the program, failed, triggering mass protests which sent the country into deep political chaos and led to dramatic developments. This, in fact, had a domino effect and triggered a more assertive Russian response and occupation that followed.

Geopolitically the EU is facing a strategic dilemma on it's eastern border; the post-Soviet space. This bloc cannot ignore its neighbourhood, as the stability of its external borders is dependent on the stability of the neighbours. However, if even some of the Eastern Partnership states were to join the EU, the concept of a neighbourhood would itself be in the need of transformation. The EU's neighbourhood would then include the wider Middle East, along with Iran and Central Asia. Despite the statements to the contrary, the EU needs a geopolitical buffer space to strategically insulate it from external instability. The neighbourhood is perfectly placed to fit into this role. The buffer's aim is not to extend the EU's influence beyond its borders, but rather ward off instability.

There is a correlation between the collapse of Ukraine and the EPI, which is related to the direct relationship and effectiveness of the EPI. In order to understand whether the EPI has been failied so far, it is first important to emphasize what is a successful outcome of the EPI. Originally, the program was shaped around Ukraine, a state which had achieved the greatest progress and first among other EPI states that started it's association talks with the EU. However, the failure to reach a deal and subsequent events, may be regarded as the failure of the political objective of the EPI program, as well as a loss in prestige.

If the EPI is analysed through the prism of alliance theory, then it becomes clear that the situation is a little bit different. The EPI has been the EU's attempt to consolidate its individual members' alignment with the post-Soviet space and mould it into a multilateral framework. However, a multilaterally designed framework was reduced to a set of bilateral alignments undermining the effectiveness of the EPI, from the very outset.

Russia, in turn, has contributed to the failure of the EPI utilising tremendously simple yet effective ways to block up any alignment between post-Soviet state with the EU or NATO's ambiguous borders. Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine are all victims of that policy. In this respect, such approaches have been effective

in countering any EU-led alignment efforts in the post-Soviet space. Thus, the EU's rules on ambiguous borders has become the element that had allowed Moscow to manipulate the situation to its own advantage. The aims are twofold. First, target country is destabilised, its sovereignty is undermined, which diminish its role in the eyes of EU as an effective partner. Second, any involvement of Moscow in situations where borders are questioned, hooks the country up to Russian influence, guaranteeing Moscow's participation in any future solutions. Hence, what has been called Europe's unfinished business, or simply 'frozen conflicts,' is becoming a significant hurdle for successful promotion of EU-sponsored alignments in the post--Soviet space.

The result of the EPI, as the EU attempt to form an alignment with several of the post-Soviet space states, have been less successful compared to Russian attempts to counter it. This suggests that EPI needs a reexamination and update. First, natural alignment patterns in the region should be taken into account. While the EU has been vocally consolidated to support Ukraine, the post-Soviet states were less assertive in this respect. Thus, traditionally allied with Ukraine, Georgia failed to support its ally barely making its position clear in the midst of the crisis. Kazakhstan became the first to react diplomatically, trying to intervene neutrally, calling parties to uphold the norms of international law. Baltic states did extend their support to Kiev.

There is even greater danger looming over Ukraine. As the result of the crisis and Russian invasion, interim authorities in Kiev are toying with the idea to revive the policy of bidding for NATO membership, unsuccessful and potentially dangerous alliance choice, which has proved to be problematic in the past. First, any NATO membership bid is a flawed alliance policy for Ukraine, as there is neither consensus on the side of NATO allies on whether they are willing to accept new post-Soviet members, nor cohesive support for country's ambition domestically, which threatens to further destabilise the state. Second, Moscow's firm position on opposing NATO's enlargement into its 'sphere of influence,' supported with its assertive actions, is a more powerful message to its own neighbourhood - post-Soviet states. Thirdly, neutrality is not a choice either, which leaves the only viable alliance policy for Ukraine, that is to become a source of alliance and construct blocs around itself, the policies both with the EU and Russia will tend to.

It is difficult to call the EPI a success even in case that Moldova and Georgia will sign association deals later this year. The EPI problems have not been confined to its wrecking multilateralism. The absence of a EU membership perspective has been pointed out by experts as early as in 2009, right after the launch of the initiative, was the program's most important fault. Any update to the program, or its replacement, will have to inevitably be more assertive and intra-EU coordinated to achieve its aims. The aims of any successor project will have to be clearly identified without the trace of uncertainty. Such project will have to address the issue of ambiguous borders in the post-Soviet space in its core. In other words, any EU-sponsored project to build an alliance with the post-Soviet states will have to embrace a mechanism to bypass the borders problem. This, perhaps, is the biggest challenge for any integration program to sort in order to deal successfully with the post-Soviet space in future.

BELARUS AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

DAVID MARPLES

There has been some discussion of late of impact on Belarus of the Russian annexation of Crimea. Some observers were encouraged by what they saw as the independent stance of Belarus and its refusal to come forth with immediate recognition of the new status of the peninsula and the city of Sevastopol. Such hopes have now been dashed by the Belarusian president.

Belarus' position was notable at first for its silent ambivalence: it did not condemn officially the "right-wing forces" that allegedly have significant influence over the new Ukrainian government; nor did it come out in favor of the position of Russia's president Vladimir Putin. Yet silence—or near-silence—from the presidential palace was broken quite dramatically by President Aliaksandr Lukashenka on March 23.

For Belarus, relations with Ukraine and Russia are at different levels. Ukraine is a significant trading partner and it is necessary to keep open the door to the southern neighbor. Lukashenka has maintained friendly relations with all the Ukrainian presidents to date, whether this statement pertains to the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko, the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych, or Leonid Kuchma, whose long rule saw the adoption of what was termed a "multi-vectored" foreign policy that was probably slightly more Western-oriented than usually credited.

The response to the events in Crimea, however, is more revealing of Belarus' real position, i.e. one in which it remains almost completely dependent on Russia for further loans in order to meet its current debt repayments. Standards of living are falling and there is a significant chance of a further devaluation of the Belarusian ruble (BLR).

As always there was a significant gap between the economic reality and the sort of rhetoric emanating from Lukashenka, most of which, prior to the president's statement, tried to create the impression that Belarus was somehow above the struggle between Russia and Ukraine, and openly defiant of Russia's demand to recognize Russian Crimea, just as earlier it refused to accept the independence of Abhazhia and South Ossetiya after the 2008 war in Georgia. If Belarus was really forging a separate path from Russia, then one wondered why the Kremlin was so obviously unworried by that situation.

The fact is that Belarus is tied economically and geo-strategically to Russia in many ways. It hosts two Russian military bases; it takes part in regular military exercises with the Russian army; its gas pipeline to Europe has been owned by the Russians since 2011; and reluctantly or not, Belarus is one of the founding members of the Russian-led Customs Union, which courted but never completely claimed the adherence of the former Ukrainian president Yanukovych.

In early March, Russia sent six SU-27 fighter jets to the Belarusian airfield at Babrujsk. Ostensibly this action was a re-

sponse to the potential buildup of US forces over the border in Poland. It may also have been linked to earlier agreements between the two countries, as Grigory Ioffe has noted.

Unlike Ukraine, Belarus is not in a position to seek closer relations with the EU, the United States, or NATO. Like Russia after the recent sanctions, most of its leaders are banned from travel to those countries, and within the EU Partnership program, Belarus is in last place of all six countries (today one should add with the possible exception of Armenia) in terms of signing an Association Agreement with the EU. At present Belarus does not have a European option as an alternative to the partnership with Russia, flawed though the latter may be.

Moreover, although the state of relations between its two neighbors has deteriorated to a situation worse than that of 2008, when then president Dmitry Medvedev severed personal relations with his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yushchenko, they have not reached a point of no return. Russia's response to the EuroMaidan may have humiliated Ukraine when it grabbed the Crimean "gift" it had offered in friendship in 1954, but the price paid has been relatively small. There have been no Russian casualties to date, and very few on the Ukrainian side. Indeed there were more fatalities from rooftop snipers around the Maidan in Kyiv than from shooting by either side in Crimea—the fact that this situation reflects the passivity of the new Ukrainian leaders notwithstanding.

Further, the main pretext for Russian actions in Ukraine is alleged maltreatment of Russian speakers and the forcible takeover of power from a "legitimate president" (Yanukovych) with the aid of Western powers. Such statements have emanated from Russian media so often that it is quite probable that most of the population believes them to be true. No doubt though the Belarusian leaders must surely have reflected on the fact that Russian speakers predominate among their population too.

The second pretext has not been advanced expressly during the Crimean events. But it has been elucidated previously on several occasions by the Russian president, i.e. the view that neither Ukraine nor Belarus are real states; rather they are different branches of one people, descended from the Kyivan Rus principality of the Middle Ages. For Vladimir Putin, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians constitute a single family under a single Russian Orthodox Church and with a common language and history.

Similar sentiments can be found frequently in the speeches of Lukashenka: he does not consider Russians to be different. Thus the existence of separate states is a consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union, an event that Putin considers a tragedy of epic proportions. Implicit in such comments is a desire for reunification, and perhaps sooner rather than later. Putin is contemptuous of the quest for nationhood in Ukraine; it is unlikely that he thinks differently about Belarus, where expressions of national consciousness are more muted.

But in Belarus there are fewer divisions than in Ukraine. The opposition has been curbed and silenced through a combination of sustained violence, intimidation, harassment, imprisonment and tortures. The potential leaders of a EuroMaidan uprising in Belarus are abroad or under close watch by the KGB. There is in Belarus no rightist force comparable with Svoboda—one would be hard pressed to think of one at all, other than perhaps the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front and the unregistered Christian Democrats. From Russia's perspective, the Belarusian president has already carried out the task it is trying to conduct in Ukraine. In this respect he slammed the door to a potential uprising firmly shut in December 2010.

Recently, the official media in Minsk switched from a moderate position to overt criticism of the new government of Ukraine. One writer for the presidential newspaper opined that it was made up of "dangerous radicals." Lacking any talent for public administration, he states, they do the only thing of which they are capable, i.e. resort to force. The statement preceded the forthright comments by Lukashenka a day later.

Lukashenka declared that the Ukrainian authorities were to blame for the current impasse, and particularly their initial decision to annul the language law allowing Russians to use their own language when making up a significant portion of the population. There are 2.5 million of them in Crimea, he added so Russia came to rescue them. Legal recognition of Crimea by Belarus is unnecessary when de facto the peninsular is now part of Russia. He described his "disgust" at events in Kyiv (EuroMaidan) as a "man and citizen." And finally he declared unequivocally that if the question should arise "we will be with Russia" and that he had informed President Putin of the same.

There could hardly have been a more forthright affirmation of where the Lukashenka regime really stands.

The key issue is whether the country can convince Moscow of its loyalty while preserving economic stability amid falling rubles (both Belarusian and Russian), and monitoring closely the new Russian imperialism that may only have taken the first of many steps to redraw the borders of Eurasia in the interests of Russian speakers everywhere. If the war expands to the Ukrainian mainland, Lukashenka may be obliged to recognize that Belarus under his tutelage is already little more than a Russian satellite, a situation for which he must bear prime responsibility.

QUOTES

Commitments are failed everywhere and international agreements are violated. We are not afraid of NATO but we have to adequately respond. If you stage an army exercise, we do the same. You keep combat-ready troops, we are forced to do the same in case, god forbid, a military conflict happens and we have to cause unacceptable damage to you. It is just a reason for you to think whether it is a good idea to invade Belarus again like the Nazi did. It is what the situation is all about

Aliaksandr Lukashenka, March 28, 2014

CULTURE & HISTORY

NAZI CRIMES IN THE USSR AS DESCRIBED IN THE WWII LETTERS, DIARIES AND MEMOIRS OF NATIVES OF BELARUS

LEONID SMILOVITSKY

BASE OF SOURCES

This report is based on a collection of military letters and sources of personal origin collected within the project "Unclaimed memory" at the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University.

The project involves searching, collecting, preserving and studying the sources of personal origin (letters, certificates of awards, photographs, citations, military letters of recommendation, casualty notifications, etc.). The deciphering of military correspondence, compiling a scholarly commentary, created a database available for researchers, historians and all those who are interested in the studies of the Holocaust and the Second World War. The results of this work would serve as basis for creating an archive of military correspondence and personal sources, publications of collections of letters, and preparing fundamental research monographs.

Wartime private correspondence, which now became a historical source, was not meant for the public eye. Many of its stories are understandable only to the participants of correspondence, so without knowledge of the context and comments it remains inaccessible. The fate of each author of the following letters is documented and is a long story to tell, but it detracts from the topic of the symposium. So I omit details of the correspondents' biographies, even though they deserve it. How these letters and sources of personal origin entered the archives of the Diaspora Research Center (none of the documents were ever published) also deserves a separate story. Why did not these documents become available to other archives and museums? I would gladly answer these questions during the discussion.

War crimes of the Nazis and the Holocaust tragedy are reflected in the wartime correspondence of each Jewish family. How deep this issue was touched depended on the awareness of participants of the correspondence, their cultural level (the ability to express own feelings), and ways to overcome censorship.

Duration of correspondence and its preservation was of crucial importance. Letters are usually not kept long. They were meant to communicate certain information and then lost their value in the eyes of those to whom they were addressed. As a rule, we deal with letters of perished soldiers and commanders which have been kept by relatives as autographs of a loved one. For relatives cared less about the letters' content; on the contrary, for a historian their content means more.

THE ANTI-JEWISH FOCUS OF NAZI POLICIES

Official media (Sovinform Bureau, TASS statements, newspapers, radio) did not mention the reasons of the Nazi genocide of Jews [1]. They reported only the factual aspect of the matter: when and where the murder took place, the number of victims, where the dead are buried. As a rule, details were reported in order to emphasize the cruelty of war criminals. In majority of cases Nazi accomplices from the local population were not mentioned. The main reasons for this were:

Soviet authorities' unwillingness to confirm the thesis that Germany fights not the Russian people, but Judeo- Bolsheviks who enslaved Russia.

Not singling out Jews from the family of the "Soviet peoples" in order to save the Stalinist internationalism and not earning accusations of Judophilia.

Such a position of the Stalinist leadership does not stand up to any criticism since the Jews were the main target of racial policies of the Nazis and doomed to total extermination. Since the end of 1942 such a position of the USSR leadership continued in its politics of anti-Semitism.

CONCEALING THE GENERAL PICTURE OF CRIMES

The scale of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union remained unknown for ordinary citizens, and society as a whole did not know anything about them – both during and after the war. Numbers of both material and human losses were taboo, as this information exposed the Soviet authorities in an unfavorable light. It was important to avoid discussions about the responsibility of the Soviet state for its erroneous policies on the eve of the war, friendship with "sworn friends", the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), and not to allow talking about the price of victory after the war.

Soviet Jews had only fragmentary, episodic pictures of the Nazi crimes (the notion *Holocaust* emerged only after 1945). During the war, there existed no single Jewish information center which would collect latest information, monitor the overall situation, evaluate preliminary results, and make analyses and forecasts. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), established with Stalin's permission in 1942 did not represent Soviet Jewry as a whole. Its main task was to create the image of democratic freedoms in the eyes of the West.

Eynikayt (Yiddish: Unity), the JAC official newspaper, published only in Yiddish, described the Jews' courage in the war, their selfless work in rear areas, suffering of the occupied territory and the murders of Jews by the Nazis. Its main purpose was to enlist moral support of the West and to mobilize resources for the needs of the front. The newspaper was distributed mainly abroad and was not available to Soviet readers.

A more specific, but still incomplete picture of the crimes

committed by Nazis became clear only after the return from evacuation.

WAR CRIMES AND ANTI-SEMITISM

During the war, anti-Semitism originated not only by Nazis. Significantly, if one could openly write and speak about beating and mass executions of Jews in the Soviet Union, anti-Semitism of the Soviet authorities and Soviet soldiers and officers, anti-Semitism applied to ordinary citizens was disclosed with great caution. In this respect, the diary by war correspondent Mikhail A. Pechersky, an employee of the newspaper "Pravda" since 1932, is very characteristic [2].

The Pechersky diary is authentic evidence of the epoch which convinces the reader with its sincerity. Many pages of the diary are imbued with tragic lyricism. In literary terms his diary reminds one of *Different days of the war* by Konstantin Simonov [3]. Courage and sincerity of presenting the events are noteworthy. The author is not afraid to criticize and even characterize his superiors and colleagues in an unflattering way. Being quite self-critical, he reveals shortcomings, and seeks the causes of failures.

However, what was written by Mikhail (notes and publications in periodicals and front print) cannot be compared with personal notes. What is this? Inner censorship and special rules guiding the author to be published? The difference between diary records and publications in the newspapers by Pechersky is so great that it is difficult to imagine that it was written by the same person.

Everything related to Soviet anti-Semitism was encrypted by making notes of general nature:

p. 93:

A talk about Anti-Semitism. Facts, facts... It's hard.

p. 94:

A town of Shchuchin. We took it on July 12, 1944. Suzdal's story about a seven-year old Jewish girl who spent three years in a Polish peasant's basement. She was asked:

- Where would you like to live now?

- Where there are kind people.

Suzdal's story about Vilna and Warsaw ghettos, etc.

P. 100:

Chausy is my home. To be precise, it is a small Jewish steading of Vileika located 3-4 km from Chausy (There is nothing written about Jews, relatives and friends who were destroyed – LS).

THE NATIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Perception of Nazi crimes by Jews (in the front and in rear areas) differed from those by non-Jews. It was an extremely sensitive moment, not reflected in the post-war Soviet historiography because it does not fit the myth of fraternal friendship of the Soviet peoples, which has withstood the test of war.

A Jew in the war felt differently than a non-Jew. He had to constantly prove his "usefulness" as a patriot and a fearless fighter. At the same time, only Jews had a sense of collective responsibility. If an individual Jew demonstrated cowardice, dishonesty, misconduct, theft, untidiness at home or other faults, it was immediately transferred to ALL Jews. So was it before the war, during the war and after the war.

Deprived of tradition, detached from religion, not knowing Yiddish (or having consciously renounced it), many Jews sincerely considered themselves Soviet people. At the same time, the state and surrounding Slavic and non-Slavic neighbors (friends, acquaintances, colleagues, fellow soldiers), continued to see them as Jews. Growing state anti-Semitism in the USSR supported by domestic anti-Semitism (in the rear areas and in the front), made the Jewish population largely vulnerable, if not defenseless.

Staff sergeant Georgiy Y. (Zorik) Epstein in correspondence with his parents repeatedly touched on this issue:

March 13, 1942

After two months of trouble I was became a member of the march company to be sent for the front and it in these days that the order suddenly came, and I was sent to Bukhara, where I participated in the formation of a new military unit. And this is a grievance. In my regiment I was considered the best gunner specialist; during maneuvers I was trusted to be a machine gun platoon commander. In the front, believe me, I will be a company commander. I came here because of the lack of commanders. I hate my nationality. I am learning military manuals and I think how much benefit I could have brought (...).

August 21, 1942

I am very disappointed with my appeal's result and have reason to believe that this is the result of my biography. Is it forever? I have learned the misfortune of my nationality.

Georgiy Epstein demanded to be sent to the front but was denied. He was admitted to the military chemical college but was expelled.

After another wound Zorik wrote home:

October 7, 1943

Everywhere I was, am and will be in front. My wounds heal. Soon I will go to the front again. I feel easy there. I have three gold and four red stripes; likely, there will be more – that is the justification of my life and nationality. I hate belonging to the despised, I myself despise them. We are the exception.

August 19, 1943

It is impossible to write more often. All these days I am fighting. Here we are attacking. "Fritz" is leaving, but battles are hot. I'm alive, healthy, darting my armored car on reconnaissance. We go ahead of the entire group, dropping the German rear, causing panic and safely coming back. The most severe disappointment was the understanding that a certain nationality is a parasite. I hate my nationality. I am ashamed of it. Nachprods (chiefs of food supply), doctors, the boy, and the one who seeks to go to the rear [4].

INFORMATION SOURCES ON THE SHOAH

Information about the Nazi crimes, murders of civilians and mass destruction of the Jews came from different sources. We

read about it in letters from the areas of the Soviet deep rear (the Urals, Siberia, Central Asia, Far East), where the families fled or were evacuated escaping from the hostilities. In turn, the soldiers and commanders of the combat army described what they witnessed. Many details can be found in the letters of the former ghetto prisoners who survived and were mobilized to or voluntarily joined the Red Army. Tragic news about the fate of the Jews who remained in the occupied territories (who could not, did not manage to or did not want to leave their native lands) was shared by their non-Jewish neighbors. Responses of of Soviet government representatives (executive committees of village, town, district and city councils) to requests from the liberated areas contained specific information. Soviet Jews wrote about the tragedy they faced to their relatives and friends abroad. Thus, all these sources can be summarized in the following order:

- from the evacuation areas to the front,
- from the combat army to the rear,
- correspondence of ghetto survivors,
- letters of neighbors who survived occupation,
- responses to inquiries from the liberated areas,
- letters from the evacuation to relatives abroad.

Letters by Jews and their non-Jewish correspondents (neighbors, co-workers) are mainly characterized by their newsworthiness. They contained messages about the tragedies, often describing how this misfortune happened, who and how was killed – shot, hanged or burned. The most infrequent letters are considered to be those containing generalizations and search for answers to the question: how all this could happen and who is to blame.

FROM THE IMMEDIATE BATTLE AREA

During the first months of the war the post service was still mechanically functioning, although the front was approaching very quickly. The concept of "the immediate battle area" meant 100 to 150 km to the line of battles with the enemy [5]. Sovinform Bureau bulletins were encouraging and not accurate, although skeptics were often right.

The archive of the Diaspora Research Center stores a unique letter from Turov (Mozyr district, Polesye Region) sent by a person who had just survived the arrival of Germans, who were temporarily knocked out by the partisans and border guards. In July-August 1941 Turov changed hands several times. Reuven Shifman wrote to Nota Chechik to the Crimea about his experiences of 18 days the occupation, when "the military position was in every backyard":

August 5, 1941

…We survived strange times from all sides (in all respects – LS). *These days are impossible to describe. All our Jews were turned out to work, and bread was given only to fascists, but not to Jews. The whole town was robbed, all shops and houses were burned. Thank God they we were not killed, but they cut my beard...* [6]

Reuven Shifman hoped that the Red Army would no longer leave Turov and the Jews would not have to see the "true faces of Germans" [7]. However, the reality proved to be different.

In the night of August 23, 1941 the enemy occupied Turov for the third and last time. German armored launches appeared from the direction of David-Gorodok. The incendiary mines caused a fire; this was followed by troops landing and capturing the town[8].

FROM THE COMBAT ARMY

Soviet Army soldiers and commanders often became direct witnesses of Nazi crimes. The Nazis killed Jews not only in the ghettos and concentration camps, but immediately after the capture of villages, towns and cities. The executions were performed by the Wehrmacht solders acting on the offensive. The executions were accompanied by robberies and violence. The regular armed forces were followed the provost corps responsible for establishing occupation administration. Jews were turned out into ghettos. Unlike in Western Europe and Poland, the ghettos in the Soviet Union mainly performed the role of a place of isolation and temporary concentration of Jews before extermination. Prisoners themselves cared about food supply; issues of maintenance of sanitary and medical services were not considered at all.

In their letters soldiers made comparisons between the victims they saw and the fate of relatives and friends who did not manage to evacuate:

January 13, 1942

Hello, my dears!

The guys brought me a letter to the warehouse; they were late — from Kharkov from my mother. These letters were following me, wherever I was. They are full of tears of tragedy, love for our family. They apparently remained in Kharkov as well as many others did. This letter requires revenge for all grievances brought by damned Germans to innocent old people. Imagine their lives under German control, if they are alive at all. Sorry that I write is such a manner, but I need to share my feelings with my family. I hope to meet you in the Soviet Kharkov without Germans. I believe that soon the time will come when it will be possible to write letters to Kharkov, the hour when it will be possible to write letters in Kharkov, but will anyone remain there? We should hope for the best [9].

July 1, 1942

My dears!

My hypotheses about the fates of Etya and Borya are black. I guess they did not manage to evacuate from their neighborhoods, as... these areas were handed over with unexpected swiftness.

Your Volodya [10].

1943, Undated

Hello Raya, Vova and Lyusenka!

…I've already [written] you, …in my previous letters about what we managed to see on the territory captured from Germans. In short, it can be said that they left nothing alive there. People who we liberated are the shadows of people. Only their eyes say that they are alive, but otherwise they look

scared. I talked to some of them and their stories are a total nightmare. This makes us even more angry and determined to destroy the bastard, and we will do everything to destroy him[11].

January 4, 1944.

My dears!

All who remained in Volkovysk, are not there anymore.

I crossed many cities and regions of Ukraine but have not met a single Jew who lived under the German occupation and survived. Ukrainians tell how Hitlerites brutally massacred Jews. First the rascals killed one by one of their own free discretion, but then they started organized mass murders. When you read in the rear about these atrocities, you believe but cannot imagine how it was in reality. I was told by witnesses about the mass murder of Jews in Kiev. I visited those places where mass murders took place. There they buried more than 100,000 people; the locality is called Babiy Yar [12].

August 6, 1944

Zhenechka!

Yesterday I did not manage to finish this letter. Now the battle stopped a little, I just finished interrogating prisoners. They said all what was necessary, these despicable cowards. And if I set them free, they will be the same murderers and robbers, as they have been during the entire war. .

The other day I met a Jewish family here. All we used to call a nightmare, horror, misery, etc. means nothing compared to what they suffered. All the troubles that you experienced is just a drop of grief, and they drank a bucket. I faced great difficulty talking to them, I gave them your address, so that they would write you, when they cross the border. It is impossible to describe what I heard from them. I will tell you when I come [13].

NOTES FROM THE VAPNYARKA CONCENTRATION CAMP

Letters sent from prisons, concentration camps, ghettos, or places of detention can be considered mot infrequent. These were rather not even letters, but short notes with no return address, sent at a convenient opportunity. Concise messages were usually addressed to wives and girlfriends, children and parents. Their size is often limited to a mere scrap of paper, which a prisoner managed to grab. In content they are neutral or allegorical in context in order not to compromise a person who agrees to take it at large. However, the value of such news from a loved one is difficult to overestimate.

In 2013, archive of the Diaspora Research Centre at the Tel Aviv University received five letters from the camp Vapnyarka (Vinnitsa Region). This is all that remained of the correspondence between Fyodor M. Silberman (born in 1906) and his wife Maria F. Ryabokonik (born 1910) which they maintained from 1941 to 1943 [14].

The family lived in Odessa. Fyodor Silberman was not subject of military conscription due to his ill health. After the outbreak of war Fyodor joined militia and helped to evacuate plants, but he was too late to leave. Silberman was arrested and placed in the building of the local police, but managed to escape. However, while attempting to cross the front line, Fyodor was arrested for the second time and sent to prison and then to the concentration camp in Vapnyarka. Silberman hid his Jewish ethnicity and managed to survive until 1943. Maria visited her husband several times with help of a friend who arranged a pass for her. On her way back she took notes for wives of prisoners and delivered them to addresses in Odessa. Likewise, Maria received similar notes from Silberman, which are still preserved. As an illustration, two of the five letters will be presented:

May 11, 1942

Address: Odessa, Remeslennaya Str. 31, Ryabokonik Marusya

Hello, my beloved Marusenka and Valechka!

I'm still alive and well, I hope that you are alive and healthy. This is the fourth note I write to you that probably do not reach you. I'm at the station Vapnyarka, in the concentration camp. I am very much in need. I've already sold off everything I had and do not have anything. Now I'm starving and doomed, like many others, to a starvation death. Marusenka, I beg you, come to me; arrange a pass for yourself and save me from starvation. Many women come here to visit their husbands. Marusenka, I feel very sorry that I did not say goodbye to you, it hurts me.

Fedya.

May 21, 1942

Hello, Marusenka and Valechka!

Marusenka, I regret that we were not given a chance to meet. You, of course, went with a heavy heart. My heart also hurts equally. Who knows what will happen next, will I see you? But Marusenka after your departure five women were allowed to meet their husbands. I am even more upset after that.

Well, I condole you, Marusenka, you are certainly worrying about Valechka, because she used to be only with you. I'm very grateful to you for that. I just opened my eyes, I agree to undergo any hardship and will live with hope to still live together with you. Be healthy.

I kiss you both very hard. Your Fedya.

When in autumn 1943 Maria Ryabokonik once again came to Vapnyarka with a package, she did not see any traces of former barracks. The fate of Fyodor can be easily guessed.

According to historical literature, Vapnyarka is a settlement in the Tomashpol district of the Vinnitsa Region located near the of the Odessa-Kiev railway station. In late July 1941, German troops occupied Vapnyarka. By autumn a concentration camp was organized there to accommodate about one thousand Jews transferred from Odessa. The camp consisted of two-story barracks and was surrounded by three rows of barbed wire. By June 1942 about two hundred Jews had died of typhus, and the rest were taken to the area of Ochakov and shot there. In October 1943, the camp was closed and the remaining prisoners were sent to Romanian jails [15].

Letters from the detention centers are eloquent both in presentation and content. They contain no signs of formal censorship (stamps, approving inscriptions, etc.). But the consequence of this self-censorship is evident. Prisoners were

well aware of what they can and cannot write and never violated the tacit taboos. Their main goal was to let their beloved hear of themselves, to inform that they were alive. The worst thing was to lose contacts at large. There were no complaints about the detention regime in the camp, nutrition, violence, beatings, or humiliations. There was no description of the types of work prisoners performed, the relationship between prisoners and guards. Instead, the prisoners regretted about the impossibility to meet their family, asked for more frequent meetings, described their plight (lack of food and clothing), and asked to help them with food.

REFERENCES:

[1] For the first time information about the Holocaust appears in letters from the end of November 1941 after the publication by "Izvestiya" daily about the tragedy at Babiy Yar (September 29-30, 1941) and then as a reflection of the note by V.I.Molotov from January (1942); *Dokumenty obvintyayut: Sbornik dokumentov o chudovischnykh zverstvakh germanskikh vlastey na vremenno zakhvachennykh imi sovetskikh territoriyakh* (B.m., 1943), Issue 1.

[2] The diary was donated to the archive of the Diaspora Research Center by M.A. Pechersky´s son Diamar Pechersky in august 2013.

[3] Simonov, K.M. *Raznye dni voyny*. The writer´s diary (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaya literature, 1982).

[4] Excerpts from the letters of staff sergeant G.Y. (Zorik) Epstein to his father, army surgeon major Yakov A. Epstein, and mother – Nina Y. Epstein (Dolzhanskaya) who was in evacuation in Kyrghyzstan. Archive of military letters of the Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University. L. Smilovitsky´s collection.

[5] *Immediate battle area* is the area adjacent to the front line, within which formations, units and administrative agencies of the operational forces are located; the areas are characterized by special regime for the civilian population.

[6] Reuven Shifman´s letter to Nota Chechik to the Crimea, August 2, 1941. Translation from Yiddish by B. Bykovsky. Military letters archive at the Diaspora Research Center.

[7] *Treyf* (Yiddish) – illicit, dirty, non-Kosher, impure.

[8] Smilovitsky, L. *Jews in Turov: The History of a Shtetl in Mozyr's Polesye Region* (Jerusalem, 2008).

[9] A letter by Mikhail (Mindel) Ratinsky to his family. Military letters archive at the Diaspora Research Center.

[10] A letter by V. Ryvkin from Chelyabinsk to the relatives evacuated to Kungur (Molotov Region), July 1, 1942.

[11] A letter by colonel Chaim M. Shkliar to his wife Raisa I. Pasternak. Military letters archive at the Diaspora Research Center.

[12] A letter by David Gam. January 4, 1944. Museum of history and culture of Belarusian Jews. Folder "Holocaust". Volkovysk.

[13] A letter by Mikhail Abramovich to his family. August 6, 1944. Military letters archive at the Diaspora Research Center.

[14] Letters were donated to the archive of the Diaspora Research Center by Valentina Belova (Silberman) on February 13, 2013.

[15] *100 evreyskikh mestechek Ukrainy.* Issue 2. Podolia (Sankt Petersburg, 2000).

Author: Dr. *Leonid Smilovitsky*, chief researcher, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University. Author of the three monographs and more than one hundred publications in the field of history of Belarus and Belarus Jewry.

Note: This text is based on Dr. Smilovitsky's lecture *Nazi Crimes in the Soviet Union as Reflected in Letters, Diaries and Memoirs of Soviet Jews. A Comparative Analysis* delivered at the International conference *East/West European Prosecution of Nazi War Crimes in the Soviet Union : From a Local to a Transnational Perspective* (March 27-29, 2014 in Berlin, Germany). This conference was organized by European Science Foundation, Centre d'études des mondes Russe, Caucasien et Centre-Européen (Paris, France) and Ruprecht-Karls Universität Heidelberg, Germany, the Centre Marc Bloch, the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung and the Ruprecht-Karls Universität Heidelberg. The second part of this text will be printed in Belarusian Review , volume 26, issue 2.

QUOTES

Ukrainians and Belarusians are not just neighbors, they are brotherly nations. Our common history proves it. It is very important for us to feel the support of the friendly Belarusian nation.

Oleksandr Turchynov, March 29, 2014

Every country brings its own perspective to the table. The Spaniards and Italians are more interested in the Mediterranean region, the British in the English-language world. But whether they are in the East, Ukraine or in Belarus, we cannot forget that there are people who live in these places who feel like Europeans and aspire to be a part of the EU. That is not, however, the case in the South - in North Africa, for example.

Radosław Sikorski, March 10, 2014

The Eastern Partnership Initiative is an important tool for the Republic of Belarus in promoting national interests in the relations with the European Union. Hence, our priority is given to the need to fill this initiative with practical content through the implementation of large, significant projects and strengthening of the business dimension of the EaP. It is important, that the initiative has a pragmatic character and brings real benefits to the people of the partner countries, including Belarus. This is the key to further development and success of this initiative.

Alena Kupchyna, January 2014

OFFICIAL BILINGUALISM IN BELARUS FALLS FAR SHORT OF FUNCTIONAL EQUALITY FOR BELARUSIAN AND RUSSIAN

CURT WOOLHISER

The term "bilingualism" has two quite distinct meanings, and I think it's important to bear this in mind when discussing the language situation in Belarus. First, there is what is called "official bilingualism" or "state bilingualism," which refers to a specific type of state language management policy regulating the use of two languages in the public sphere, whether at the national or regional level. In addition, the term bilingualism can refer simply to the use of two languages in the linguistic repertoires of individuals or social groups, which may in fact be largely independent of the language policies pursued by the state.

I'll begin with the first meaning of the term "bilingualism." Official bilingualism presupposes the existence of a certain body of laws and regulations governing language use in specific domains, as well as the manner in which they are implemented - how, and to what extent, these rules actually affect the linguistic practice of government and non-government actors, and whether or not there are any sanctions applied to those who fail to comply. From a strictly legal standpoint, since the 1995 referendum that conferred co-official status to Russian, and in particular since the 1998 amendments to the Language Law, the language regime in Belarus could be described as one of official bilingualism. In practice, however, the state's role in supporting the use of Belarusian is extremely selective and limited. "Official bilingualism" in Belarus is to a large degree a "Potemkin village," more window-dressing and symbolism than real substance, despite whatever good intentions there might be on the part of some policymakers and government officials. In this respect, it could be said that the current language regime in Belarus has much in common with Soviet practice in the BSSR, especially after WWII, where, under the guise of promoting "national-Russian bilingualism" the regime pursued a de facto policy of linguistic assimilation. Given this history, it's not surprising that the term "official bilingualism" remains ideologically loaded in the post-Soviet context. The opposition of Ukrainian language advocates to the language law that was passed last summer by the Verkhovna Rada, which gives co-official status to minority languages in regions where they are spoken by over 10% of the population (meaning in practice mostly Russian), is also entirely understandable in light of Ukraine's experience of late Soviet "official bilingualism."

Very often, when a government pursues a policy of official bilingualism, one of the state languages has in the past faced discrimination and marginalization, and thus may be in need of special measures to ensure that it enjoys equal status with the historically dominant language. Moreover, in some bilingual countries or regions, the historically non-dominant language has lost speakers due to linguistic assimilation, and thus requires active "acquisition planning" through the educational system, along with other language provision measures, to expand its demographic base and ensure its long-term survival. Claiming to uphold the principle of "free choice" of the language of interaction, the Belarusian government under Lukašenka has done very little to correct the historic imbalance in the use of Russian and Belarusian in the public sphere, and has done nothing to reverse the process of language shift from Belarusian to Russian that has been underway over the last several generations. Rather than stipulating equal legal status of the two languages, the amended 1998 Language Law simply requires the use of "Belarusian and (or) Russian," the disjunctive conjunction in effect permitting exclusive use of Russian in most contexts. Also noteworthy is the omission in the amended version of the preamble to the 1990 Language Law, which declared the necessity to provide special protection to the Belarusian language, inasmuch as "its functions have been significantly reduced and its very existence is threatened."

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus still guarantees the right of all citizens to use their native language, freely choose the language of communication (albeit in which domains remains unspecified) and the language of instruction in public education (Article 50). Article 4 of the Language Law, moreover, requires all government officials and employees at the national, regional and local level to be proficient in both Belarusian and Russian "to the extent necessary for performing their duties."

In the sphere of public education, the Law on Education (Article 5) states that "Belarusian and (or) Russian" are the main languages of instruction in schools and universities, and that the state guarantees the choice of language of instruction and "creates the conditions necessary for exercising this right." While the addition of the conjunction "or" essentially allows for the continued dominance of Russian in the educational process, Article 24 states that the teaching of the Belarusian language as a subject is obligatory in all educational institutions regardless of their area of specialization.

In practice, since the 1995 referendum exercising "free choice" in matters of language has been largely the prerogative of government officials rather than ordinary citizens, that is, the latter are expected to accommodate to the wishes of the former (who almost always favor Russian). In service encounters, although in theory Belarusian speakers have an equal right to use their language in such exchanges, if anyone is required to accommodate linguistically to facilitate a successful transaction, almost invariably, the onus falls on the Belarusian-speaking customer (as a result, many Belarusian speakers avoid using Belarusian in such contexts to avoid potential miscommunication or embarrassment).

As in the late Soviet period, the Belarusian language in official usage since the mid-1990s has tended to serve a primarily symbolic function, as reflected in the presence of Belarusian-language signage alongside Russian in government agencies, the use of bilingual Belarusian-Russian letterhead on official documents (with texts predominantly in Russian),

and the appearance of occasional Belarusian-language posters and slogans on national holidays. Not only President Lukašenka himself, but most other government officials speak almost exclusively in Russian in their public appearances. In 2007 it was reported that in the National Assembly only one deputy out of 210, the head of the Commission on Education, Culture and Science, Uladzimir Zdanovič, gave his speeches in Belarusian rather than Russian.

As the role of the internet in Belarus has expanded, the Belarusian government's peculiar approach to official bilingualism has also come to be reflected in language provision on official government websites. For a number of years following its creation, President Lukašenka's website was available only in Russian and English versions, although in 2008 a Belarusian language version, with all texts and speeches translated into Belarusian, was added. The Council of Ministers, Constitutional Court, Supreme Economic Court and National Bank also now have Belarusian language versions of their websites, while the websites of the two houses of the National Assembly, the Council of the Republic and the House of Representatives, as well as the sites for the Supreme Court and General Prosecutor and State Control Committee are still only in Russian (with English versions in some cases, as well). Very few government ministries have Belarusian-language versions of their websites; as of June 2012, only five ministries out of twenty-three – Culture, Education, Defense, Communications, and Energy – had Belarusian-language versions. It should be noted that the Ministry of Culture's website is available now only in Belarusian (there is not even an English-language version!), while the content on the Belarusian-language versions of the websites of the Ministries of Education and Defence is more limited than on their Russian-language versions. It is telling that the websites of most of the key ministries, including Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Economics, Industry, Trade, Agriculture and Food, Labor and Social Security, and Information, have only Russian-language versions (with parallel English versions in some cases). Moreover, the websites of regional governments and legislative bodies are generally only in Russian (and in some cases, have an English version as well), the only exception at present being Hrodna voblasć, where both the sites of the regional government and legislature have Belarusian-language versions. However, we should bear in mind that the presence of Belarusian-language versions of the websites of government institutions and agencies says nothing about their working language (perhaps the only exception being the Ministry of Culture, which has reportedly in recent years been using mainly Belarusian), and thus to a certain extent also falls into the category of symbolic language use.

The educational system, which was the primary focus of the policy of Belarusianization in the period 1990-1994, has seen the balance shift sharply in favor of Russian since the 1995 referendum. While at the height of the post-Soviet Belarusianization of primary education in 1993/1994, 40.6% of all schoolchildren and 76% of all first graders were reported to be receiving Belarusian-medium education, by the 2008/2009 academic year, only 18% of all students were in exclusively Belarusian-medium schools or groups; as of 2009, in urban areas, only 1.9% of all first graders were enrolled in Belarusian-medium schools. If the authorities were serious about promoting official bilingualism, one might expect that there would still be a larger percentage of Belarusian-medium schools, as well as truly bilingual schools where different subjects are taught in either Belarusian or Russian. While a quasi-bilingual model was pursued until 2006, with obligatory classes in Belarusian history and geography taught in Belarusian alongside the Belarusian language and literature curriculum in Russian-medium schools, since that time history and geography have largely been taught in Russian as well (supposedly the choice of language is left to the parents, although it seems likely that Russian is becoming the "default" language for these subjects). According to recent data from the Belarusian Language Association, only about 5% of schoolchildren in urban schools, and about 20-25% in rural schools are studying Belarusian history and geography in Belarusian. Thus far, however, the authorities have not gone so far as to "excuse" pupils in Russian-medium schools from the study of Belarusian language and literature, as was the practice in the late Soviet period (for example, in 1970, some 30% of schoolchildren in the BSSR, and 90% in the city of Minsk, were "excused" altogether from studying Belarusian even as a subject).

As was the case for much of the Soviet period, higher education in Belarus remains dominated by Russian. However, due to the influx of younger faculty and students with stronger Belarusian language skills, the language has begun to make some (admittedly limited) inroads beyond the "linguistic reservations" of Belarusian philology, history and ethnic studies to which it had been largely banished by the 1960s. Courses in fields such as international and criminal law, political science and philosophy are now occasionally offered in Belarusian (the choice of language of generally determined by the instructor), and Belarusian-language tracks have in some cases even been created for students of medicine and other non-humanities specializations. It should be stressed, however, that such efforts are largely due to the initiative and commitment of individuals, rather than to any consistent internal policies of their institutions or directives from the Ministry of Education. Certainly, little or nothing is done on an official level to encourage university instructors to offer new courses in Belarusian. Indeed, Belarusian-speaking faculty in non-philological disciplines report that they often encounter hostility on the part of some of their Russian-speaking colleagues. One of the greatest obstacles, apart from the lack of any institutional support for expanding Belarusian-language higher education, is the absence of textbooks in non-humanities subjects in Belarusian. Moreover, the Belarusian authorities have consistently rejected proposals to create a separate "Belarusian National University," in which all or most subjects would be taught in Belarusian.

The situation in the print and electronic media also illustrates the imbalanced nature of "bilingualism" in Belarus. According to official statistics, in 2011 only 26.4% of all newspapers printed in Belarus were in Belarusian (although this figure also includes periodicals that publish in both Belarusian and Russian), while 72% were in Russian. As for magazines and journals published in Belarus, in 2011 only 17.4% were in Belarusian and 81% in Russian. While the government continues to

subsidize a number of Belarusian-language periodicals, their circulation is considerably smaller than that of their Russian--language counterparts. In addition to closing or artificially restricting the circulation of oppositional Belarusian-language newspapers and other publications, the government has also in recent years closed down or merged a number of state--funded Belarusian-language publications, including those designed for children and youth.

The situation in book publishing is even more critical; according to the official figures for 2011, only 8.5% of the total print run was in Belarusian, only twice the percentage of books and brochures published in English, while Russian-language materials accounted for 85.3%.

Like the print media, television broadcasting in Belarus is dominated by the Russian language. In 2011 it was estimated that slightly less than 5% of all programming on the state--owned television channels, Channel 1 and Channel 2 (Lad), was in Belarusian. All other channels broadcast exclusively in Russian. It should also be noted that Belarusian-language programming on state television, such as it exists, focuses primarily on historical, literary and ethnographic subject matter; most news and analytical programming dealing with political, economic and social issues is in Russian. Thus, the only source for exclusively Belarusian-language television programming is the independent Poland-based Belsat network.

The situation of Belarusian is considerably better in radio broadcasting; according to official 2011 data, Radio Belarus' Channel 1 broadcast only 8 hours' worth of Russian-language programming, while 8752 hours were in Belarusian. The Minsk-based radio station "Stalica" also broadcasts exclusively in Belarusian. Overall, for all radio stations operating in Belarus, 56% of all airtime was devoted to Belarusian-language programming and 42% to Russian.

Another important aspect of language policy in any country, whether officially monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, is the extent to which the state regulates the presence and salience of written texts in public spaces, i.e. public and commercial signage (this is known in the recent sociolinguistic literature as the "linguistic landscape"). In Belarus there appears to be no consistent policy concerning the use of the two state languages in signage; rather, different government agencies at the national, regional and local level have, at different times, pursued somewhat different policies. One of the legacies of the period of "Belarusianization" of the early 1990s is that many street signs and road signs are in Belarusian only, with no Russian-language counterparts (occasionally this can prove confusing to foreign visitors who only know Russian, particularly in those cases whether there are significant orthographic or lexical differences between the Belarusian and Russian equivalents). However, in some regions, for example, the Hlybokaje district in Viciebsk voblasć, Russian-language road signs are still prevalent, despite the fact that up to 90% of the population there claim Belarusian as their native language. The situation in public transportation is similar, with different agencies (for example, the Minsk metro, Belarusian State Railways, inter-city bus services, etc.) apparently following their own internal guidelines for use of Belarusian and Russian. As for commercial signage and advertising, it appears that the trend since 1995 has generally been in favor of Russian, inasmuch as the amended Language Law sanctions using either one of the state languages, but does not require signage in both.

In the service sector, whether state-owned or private, the use of spoken Belarusian is minimal, and there are no regulations in place requiring businesses to provide Belarusian language signage or labeling, or encouraging them to employ Belarusian-speaking personnel.

The government's lack of interest in ensuring actual legal equality of the country's two official languages has led to a situation where both government officials and service sector employees can simply ignore citizens' requests for Belarusian--language services with impunity. Of course, it would admittedly be unrealistic to expect a policy of respect for the linguistic rights of all citizens in a state which regularly violates other constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and actively censors the mass media (this in spite of the fact that the country's constitution explicitly prohibits censorship and state monopolization of the media). In other words, the shortcomings of the official "bilingual" policy in contemporary Belarus are not so much due to inherent flaws in the principle of official bilingualism per se, but are to a significant degree a result of the authorities' disregard for the rule of law.

The Francysk Skaryna Belarusian Language Society, the Society for Belarusian Schools and other Belarusian human rights groups have registered numerous instances where citizens' constitutionally guaranteed language rights have been violated, or where citizens have been actively discouraged by government officials or other citizens from exercising these rights. For example, the Belarusian Language Society has received complaints that Belarusian Postal Service employees have refused to accept telegrams written in Belarusian, citing "technical difficulties"; judges have regularly refused to hear cases in Belarusian, or provide translators for Belarusian--speaking defendants (usually members of the opposition); students applying for admission to universities have been instructed to fill out forms in Russian rather than Belarusian to "expedite processing"; numerous obstacles have been created by school officials to discourage those parents wishing to have their children receive their education in Belarusian to exercise this right; hotel staff have refused to accept registration forms filled out in Belarusian; individuals have even been detained by police in the vicinity of opposition protests simply on the grounds that they were speaking Belarusian (interpreted as a sign of oppositional sympathies). In contrast, there have been no reported instances (as far as I am aware) of linguistic discrimination against Russian speakers in Belarus.

In 2003 the Belarusian Language Society was successful in having a complaint concerning allegations of linguistic discrimination heard by the Constitutional Court. The Court, in its decision of December 3, 2003, concluded that the principle of equality of Belarusian and Russian in the public sphere established by the constitution and language legislation was indeed being violated: "…despite formal legal equality of the state languages, in practice the principle of their balanced use is not being observed, which gives rise to justifiable con-

cern on the part of the Belarusian Language Society..." In its decision, the Court further proposed "to examine the issue of introducing to the Law "On Languages in the Republic of Belarus" and other legislation amendments that can ensure actual equality of the state languages." In 2005 it was reported that the Commission on Education, Science, Culture and Scientific and Technical Progress of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of the Belarus National Assembly, had taken into account the Constitutional Court's ruling in its work on proposed amendments to the Language Law, but the legislature has as of yet failed to bring the amendments to the floor for a vote. Moreover, despite provisions for legal action against violators of certain provisions of the language law, there have been no instances of prosecution of government agencies or other entities or individuals on these grounds. Several years ago, Ryhor Vasilevich, the chairman of the Constitutional Court of Belarus, stated publicly that "In the Constitution it is expressly forbidden to discriminate against citizens on the basis of religion, gender, race and language. The situation in our country is good with all of these, except language."

Following Lukashenka's tentative rapprochement with the EU and the lifting of EU sanctions in 2008, the Belarusian government began to make a number of limited concessions in the sphere of language policy, signaling at the very least a possible truce in the ongoing culture war. Indeed, since 2009 a number of Belarusian commentators, as well as some anxious Russian observers, have spoken of an impending policy shift toward "Belarusianization."

In January of 2010, the Belarusian government adopted a "Schedule of Measures for Promoting the Belarusian Language," which provided a timetable for specific steps to expand the use of Belarusian in public life. Beginning in the autumn of 2010, the Ministry of Education was to take steps to increase the number of Belarusian-language classes in primary and secondary schools, to provide for optional free additional Belarusian-language classes for students in Russian-language schools, and to provide greater access to Belarusian-language preschools. In addition, at the university level steps were to be taken to increase the number of subjects (particularly in the humanities) taught in Belarusian, and to provide instruction in professional terminology for students in non-humanities disciplines. Other measures that were to be implemented in 2010 included publication of new school textbooks employing revisions to the 1959 Belarusian orthography which went into effect in September 2010, increasing the Belarusian-language collections of school and municipal libraries, organizing regular meetings with Belarusian writers, language Olympiads and other events designed to promote awareness of Belarusian language and literature. Significantly, most of these measures, particularly those affecting the educational system, have been implemented only partially, or not at all.

In the fall of 2010, prior to the presidential elections, it was also reported that some regional officials, for example the chairman of the Executive Committee of Hrodna voblasć, Siamion Šapira, were taking steps to promote the use of Belarusian as the language of official documentation and government business. However, following the crackdown on the Belarusian opposition in the wake of the December 2010 elections and as the economic crisis deepened, the momentum of the regime's tentative "Belarusianization" policy slowed significantly.

In July of 2011, following a letter writing campaign called "Official Documentation in Belarusian" (*Spravavodstva pa-belarusku*) launched by law student and language rights activist Ihar Slučak in 2009, amendments to the law on citizens' petitions were adopted, requiring government agencies to respond to citizens' correspondence in the language in which it was written. Slučak has sent letters to all members of both houses of the Belarusian National Assembly, lobbying for changes to the language law that would make official use of Belarusian, alongside Russian, obligatory.

In November 2011, at a session of the House of Representatives devoted to educational policy, the minister of education, Siarhiej Maskevič, declared that in his opinion, "bilingualism, which exists in the country today, must be viewed above all as the obligation to have a mastery of both Russian and Belarusian," a statement that was interpreted by many observers as a sign of official support for the proposed change to the language law to require functional, rather than purely declarative bilingualism. However, there are few indications that such occasional official statements in support of genuine official bilingualism reflect any significant policy shifts. Indeed, one gets the impression that the Lukašenka regime is using language policy essentially as a bargaining chip in its continuing balancing act between the West and the opposition on the one hand, and Moscow and the Russophile lobby within the Belarusian elite on the other.

Since Moscow's renewal of its economic support for the Belarusian regime in late fall 2011, it appears that the pendulum has again begun to swing away from "Belarusianization." Lukašenka himself has repeatedly stated that as far as he is concerned, the language question "has been settled once and for all." In March of 2012, a directive to regional and local authorities written by Aliaksandr Radźkoŭ, first deputy head of the Presidential Administration, instructed them to "take concrete measures to prevent the policy of forced Belarusianization by heads of government bodies and other organizations and the artificial limitation of the use of the Russian language in their activities." It seems highly unlikely that this order would have been made without the knowledge and approval of the president.

In my remarks thus far, I have been referring to bilingualism as a specific type of state language management policy. As we've seen, in practice "official bilingualism" as interpreted by the Belarusian authorities falls far short of the ideal of functional equality for Belarusian and Russian; rather, it has helped perpetuate linguistic inequality and has done little to stop the ongoing process of language shift to Russian. This is in fact one of the reasons that many Ukrainian speakers have been so vociferously opposed to the introduction of Russian as an official language in their country, as they know full well that the "official bilingualism" supported by the Party of Regions would differ little in practice from the Soviet or contemporary Belarusian model, in which the language preferences of government officials take precedence over the language rights of all citizens.

ALEŚ KRAŬCEVIČ: APPROPRIATION OF THE GDL HISTORY CEMENTS MODERN LITHUANIAN NATION

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Orša. On this occasion, 23 December 2013 Lithuanian Parliament declared 2014 the Year of the Battle of Orša. Victory in it is called "historic" that enabled protection to " the territorial integrity of Lithuania" (*Lietuvos teritorinis vientisumas*). The relevant resolution emphasizes that the Battle of Orša bears important historical relationship of Lithuania with Belarus and Ukraine, and refers to the multiethnic composition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania troops (*daugiatautė LDK kariuomenė*). In turn, preparations for this anniversary in Belarus take place only at the level of civil society. How important is the celebration of such historical events at the state level and how this may affect Belarusian-Lithuanian relations in the sphere of history? Belarusian Review addressed these questions to a well-known Belarusian historian Aleś Kraŭcevič.

Aleś Kraŭcevič: "Proclamation 2014, the Year of the Battle of Orša by the Lithuanian Seimas with the justification that it allegedly allowed protection relating to the "territorial integrity of Lithuania" is an internal affair of contemporary Lithuania, or more precisely, their internal fantasy. First, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which was protecting itself in that battle is far from being equal to ethnic Lithuania. Second, the contribution of the ancestors of ethnic Lithuanians in that battle was marginal, likewise was their participation in the entire state.

As for the then ethnic Lithuanian soldiers, there is, for example, a fragment of the message of King and Grand Duke dated by 1535, which indicates their limited use during hostilities, "*... and the boyars-gentry of the Eldership of Samogitia should not be burdened with any difficulties, as these people are unfit [for this duty] and horses are small, and especially, as they are not ase at the Ruthenian language…*"

The fact is that for a small Lithuanian nation the invented majestic history, in particular the appropriation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania history, provides the basis of state ideology which cements the modern Lithuanian nation. Lithuanian ideologists grip on their fantasy history and are not going to change anything in it. *Habeat sibi.*

Another thing is how it is perceived by the outside world. While Belarusians did not have statehood, they should consume Russian-imposed colonial version of their past, as if, bad Lithuanians occupied Belarus and fraternal Moscow freed it.

In independent Belarus own historiography is gaining stength, in particular with regard to the awareness of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the Belarusian state. As it evolves, our research becomes known to historians of other countries and they start looking differently at our past. Thus, the statement of the Lithuanian Seimas refers to the historical linkage of Lithuania with Belarus and Ukraine through the Battle of Orša.

If Lithuanian historians do not bring their ideological version history of the GDL in conformity with the scientific one, in due course their fantasy of greatness and their role in the past will become the laughingstock for their neighbors."

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

ON THE IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHY OF THE BELARUSIAN HUMANITIES

ANDRZEJ TICHOMIROW

During the last 20 years Belarusian humanities have undergone a complex and anything but straightforward transformation. The need to switch from Marxist-Leninist methodology and heavy ideological control was one of the main goals. However, the specific conditions in which Belarusian science has developed does not allow or include discussion about a "complete" settlement of these problems. Political changes during the Soviet perestroika period of 1985-1991 resulted not only in socio-economic changes and the final collapse of the Soviet Union, but also resulted in the complete reassessment of "knowledge production".

Before the restoration of independence in 1991, a certain form of autonomy within the Belarusian scientific milieu was limited by the borders of the Belarusian SSR. Political boundaries established after 1945 simultaneously became borders of possible knowledge. Exploring issues that would not directly link with the territory of Belarus was very limited or became subject to certain restrictions. In historical science such "exceptions" could include some aspects of ancient world history (one can refer to works on the history of the Hittites, the Qumran manuscripts or ancient Rome), the Middle Ages (however, for a long time these issues were considered "unfashionable"), modern or recent history. All of these exceptions assumed that a part of this kind of research could be conducted in Belarus provided there were specialists in the relevant fields of science. At the same time the "production" of works on the "non-Belarusian" (and sometimes on proper Belarusian) issues required departure to the all-Union scientific centers – Moscow and former Leningrad (now St. Petersburg).

Topics from the nineteenth century were studied in a rather specific form; despite the declarative subordination to the principle of historicism and the "imaginary geography", study of Belarusian lands during the Soviet period was only partially reflected in the administrative reality of the Russian Empire. The division into provinces and districts was certainly shown but administrative and managerial realities of epoch were ignored and historians separated counties into Belarusian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Polish. Accordingly, Belarusian historians were not allowed to describe processes in Latgalia, Podlachia, as well as in the Vilna (today's: Vilnius) and Smolensk regions just because at that time they were parts of the neighboring Union republics or neighboring states. In such cases it was necessary to use very complex verbal acrobatics to at least provide the reader with some basic factology on these issues. The city of Vilna in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries was a natural political and cultural center of the entire region (officially called in the Russian Em-

pire as "North Western Province"). It was also the most important center of Belarusian culture and social life (particularly in the end during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries). Within the context of Belarusian studies it was very difficult not to refer to the role this city played. However, official policies were aimed at removing this city's perception as "own" cultural center from the mass consciousness of Belarusians and portraying it "only" as the capital of neighboring fraternal union republic. It was only in literary studies that scholars, who acted almost like "smugglers", managed to show Vilna's role and significance in Belarusian culture. Historians pointed to this city only if it was absolutely necessary to refer to it as the site where certain events took place or where publication of books and newspapers was organized.

Besides this understandable ideological pressure (mandatory and formally only possible within the framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy), a rather closed space for "imaginary Belarusian knowledge" has developed. It was bounded by the administrative borders of the Belarusian SSR. There was perhaps only one exception; – information about Belarusians in Poland. Thus, references to the Podlachian region were allowed to flow to a mass audience but in a rather limited form. The most likely reason for such an attitude was determined by the very existence of institutionalized life within Belarusian organizations, schools and the press in Poland. For the Belarusian SSR it was too difficult to ignore this situation. It was much easier to advocate omission of Belarusian presence in Lithuania and other Soviet republics since such institutionalization of Belarusian life was simply not foreseen there. As a result, during the late 1980s the majority of Belarusians discovered knowledge about *Vilnia* as "their own" city. For some intellectuals this fact was equated to inspiration; a feeling very close to religion

This geographic limitation of knowledge, which was drawn up by the boundaries of Belarusian SSR has led to a number of consequences. They were not only of a cognitive nature, but also affected the mass consciousness of a significant part of the population. The collapse of the Soviet system and ideology and strengthening of a Belarusian independent state "liberated" a tabooed factology; as the existence of such facts were unknown previously to all professional historians, the late 1980s therefore was a revelation. These new discoveries also expanded a Belarusian "imaginary geography" which included not only the adjacent areas in neighboring countries, but most of the world as the possibility of contact and study of Belarusian diasporas in Europe, North America or Australia was now made available.

It should be noted that the partial de-Sovietization that took place in science during the last decade only partially affected changes in the geographical perception of Belarusianness. At the same time, it should be stressed that the "memory recovery" neither resulted into the desire to change the boundaries nor provided neighboring states with any challenges. Expansion of the "imaginary" Belarusianness has in fact prompted cooperation with neighboring research centers and is gradually promoting integration of Belarusian humanities into the global scientific process.

BELARUS AND ITS METAPHORS

BRENDAN MCCALL

"Metaphor," wrote Aristotle, "consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else." Intrinsic to our thoughts and how we organize the perceptions that compose the stories of our lives, we describe the people, places, and subjects in our world through metaphor and analogy, simile and symbol.

But are these images accurate portrayals of the world around us? Do we sometimes embellish, like the artist, and create subjective paintings instead of documentary photographs? What is the interplay between reality and imagination?

Examining *how* we tell stories, in addition to the story itself, is a recurring feature of our modern times. For example, writers like Susan Sontag investigate the lens through which we experience disease and terminal illness, and how such language can victimize those afflicted. In Ways of Seeing, John Berger highlights some of the contextual frameworks informing our perception of visual art, revealing hidden ideologies. Critics like Camille Paglia, Michel Foucault, and Eve Sedgwick rigorously re-examine many of our seemingly familiar literary texts, cultural icons, and social phenomenon – from Madonna and Robert Mapplethorpe to the literature of Hawthorne, Melville, and Oscar Wilde. Such insights reveal just as much about us, as it does about the thing itself.

For the artist and the writer, metaphors are one of the defining characteristics of their work, regardless of genre. Some set out to create worlds which are obviously fictitious, some attempt to be rigorous in their realism. A few purposefully create imaginary places resembling their "real" counterparts, challenging our ability to distinguish fact from fabrication. William Faulkner',s „little postage stamp" of Yoknapatawpha County evokes rural Mississippi, and Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon resembles a certain kind of Minnesota; but neither will ever be found in North America. While not real, this artistic geography sometimes can affect us in more compelling ways than actual places.

Perhaps the "reality" of a place does not matter, or is not of sole importance. Maybe imaginary places can have tangible and valuable benefits in "real life". Italo Calvino's famous book Invisible Cities, while describing imaginary places visited by Marco Polo, also inspires architects with fresh approaches to contemporary urban theory. Separate from its actual geographic location in Turkey, the events depicted in Homer's Iliad occupy a firm and distinct place within our collective imagination.

In this sense, the Republic of Belarus occupies an unusual territory. While geographically landlocked by Russia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, many Europeans fail to locate Belarus on a map. Yet, as "the last dictatorship of Europe," its presence is distinctly known across international borders. It has the strange distinction of being both widely known in terms of metaphor, yet elusive in terms of its reality through

direct knowledge. For most of the world, Belarus is a kind of Troy – existing both as fact as well as metaphor.

Unfortunately, journalism is highly restricted in Lukashenka's Belarus today. When reports do emerge to international news outlets, the stories can often be baffling, even surreal in their narrative. Didn´t the KGB end with the collapse of the Soviet Union? An invasion by 800 teddy-bears with parachutes? Police in Minsk tear-gassing protesters for clapping? News writing about Belarus depicts a strange world, challenging our assumptions about contemporary Europe. We crave a harmonious story which depicts a continent unified in freedom and democracy, and grow uneasy with the dark and complex metaphors Belarus screams at us. Too often, people simply stop listening; the truth is too painful, and too inconvenient.

Like the "dictator novels" of Latin America which challenged the established (dis)order, the plays and performances by the *Belarus Free Theatre* resist their government's attempts at censorsing and sanitizing contemporary art. Lead by Nicolai Khalezin and Natalya Koliada, their Theatre aims to depict a more "real" Belarus through dramatic storytelling and metaphor – a counterpoint to the peaceful narratives told by Lukashenka authoritarian regime. The actors and the audiences who watch them perform have frequently been arrested, and *Belarus Free Theatre* have been in exile since 2011. They continue to write and perform their work around the world, oftentimes inspiring international audiences into greater awareness about the restrictions on freedom in today's Belarus.

The *Belarusian Dream Theater* project hopes to stand in solidarity with artists like Nicolai and Natalya, using the tools of metaphor and story to support freedom of expression in Belarus much like journalists who use the veracity of concrete facts. On 25 March 2014, seventeen partner-theatres across Europe, the United States, and Australia will present – *simultaneously* – new plays about Belarus by writers from Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Belarus itself. Playwrights are donating their works free of any royalty, and staged by actors and directors working for free. Seeking to place Belarus and its metaphors centerstage, the participating international artists of *Belarusian Dream Theater* consciously planned the project to occur on 25 March – Belarus' Freedom Day.

The 25 short plays comprising the project run the gamut of style, subject matter, tone, and aesthetic. There are political dramas, like "Under Protest" by David L. Williams and Aurin Squire's "Article 119-1"; as well as intimate family dramas such as Vivienne Glance's "Draniki" and "In The Belarusian Kitchen" by Nikolay Rudkovski. The humor in Rex McGregor's "Welcome to Belarus" is absurdist, while "No One Gives a Clap" by Jake Rosenberg is straight-up comedy. There's the abstract movement-theater of Laura Lynn MacDonald's "en dangerous (part I and part II)"; "Battle in Babruysk" by Diane Rao Harman is a fable; and "The Puppet of White Farm" is described as an ‚impossible musical,' by its author Richard Pettifer.

Some of the plays in Belarusian Dream Theater stretch the bounds of imagination, portraying private hopes and dreams, or enacting innermost fears too terrible to contemplate. These stories push, poke, jab, and jolt. While in some cases a dramatization of known facts within or about Belarus, these stories are not bound by place or time, by the topography of facts. Entering a theater is traveling within the realm of metaphor, where 2 + 2 does not always equal 4. Sometimes we hunger more for Homer's poetry about the Trojan War, instead of the historical account of the fall of Troy, as believable characters move us more often than statistical facts. Sometimes our imagination is the only way we can comprehend a place so contradictory, so complicated, and so uncompromisingly real as Belarus.

Author: *Brendan McCall,* an American theater artist, conceived and produced the Belarusian Dream Theater project. He is the Manager of the Cummins Theatre (Western Australia), and the Artistic Director of Ensemble Free Theater Norway.

FACTBOX

Military Prosecution offices will be eliminated in Belarus starting 1 September. The decision was formalized by Belarus President Decree No. 137 signed on March 26. The duty to impose the rules of conduct in the Belarusian Armed Forces, other forces and military units of Belarus, government agencies associated with military service will be assumed by the Prosecutor-General's Office and territorial prosecutor's offices.

Source: *BelTA,* March 27, 2014.

Russia has deployed six SU-27 fighters and three military transport jets to Belarus, in an apparent reaction to growing NATO activity near the Belarusian border. Belarusian President Aliaksander Lukashenka suggested on March 12 that Russia deploy up to 15 planes in Belarus in response to the NATO activity.

Source: *Xinhua,* March 13, 2014.

Belarus exported $235.3 million worth of tourist services in 2013, up 14.6% from 2012. Yet, the tourism industry underperformed in 2013. The country was expected to get $250 million in tourism revenue (up 21%). The export growth target was not met by Minsk, and Homiel and Mahilioŭ Regions. In 2014, Belarus looks to increase tourism revenues to $360 million.

Source: *BelTA,* March 13, 2014.

In 2013 Russian natural gas transit via Belarus totaled 48.8 billion cubic meters, up 10.3% from 2012. The gas pipeline system of Gazprom Transgaz Belarus pumped a total of 14.1 billion cubic meters of gas. The Belarusian pipeline of Russia's Yamal-Europe main transported 34.7 billion cubic meters. In 2012 the figures stood at 15.3 billion cubic meters and 29 billion cubic meters of gas respectively.

Source: *BelTA,* February 28, 2014.

BELARUSIAN STUDIES IN SCANDINAVIA

The previous issue of Belarusian Review (vol. 25, issue 4) contained two contributions by Virginie Symaniec and Ēriks Jēkabsons on Belarusian studies in France and Latvia respectively. In this issue Belarusian Review asks two scholars from Sweden and one from Norway to provide their vision of the current state of Belarusian studies in their countries. These scholars are Andrej Kotljarchuk, senior researcher at Södertorn University and university lecturer at Stockholm University, Jakub Święcicki, research associate at Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), and Martin Paulsen, post-doctoral fellow at University of Bergen. All scholars expressed their own view of the situation in written form, independently from each other. Belarusian Review keeps the answers received from the interviewed scholars unchanged, as these answers have been sent to the editorial board.

Belarusian Review: *How could you evaluate the contemporary situation with regard to Belarusian studies in Sweden and Norway?*

Andrej Kotljarchuk: They are marginalized. After the growing interest in the end of 1990s –beginning of 2000s a number of Swedish publications regarding Belarus have been recently reduced. In 1997 Prof. Barbara Törnqvist-Plewa at the Lund University has published the first academic monograph in about Belarus in Swedish Språk och identitet i Vitryssland: en studie i den vitryska nationalismens historia (Language and identity in Belarus: a study of the Belarusian nationalism history). This book was republished by national university publishing house "Studentlitteratur" in 2001 and still is a basic and only single book in Swedish about the concise history of Belarus, its languages and culture. Barbara Törnqvist-Plewa is also the author of various academic articles on Belarusian history[1]. In 2004 the Södertörn university published an anthology Contemporary change in Belarus including the articles of Swedish and international scholars among them David R. Marples, Anna Brzozovska, Andrej Kotljarchuk and Barbara Törnqvist-Plewa. In 2006 Andrej Kotljarchuk has published his doctoral dissertation on early modern international relations between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Finally in 2012 the researcher at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) Jakub Święcicki has published a monograph Vitryssland – Europas sista diktatur (Belarus, Europe's last Dictatorship) about the contemporary political situation in Belarus. That's all.

Jakub Święcicki: There are no independent Belarusian studies in Sweden.

Martin Paulsen: I consider the contemporary situation for Belarusian studies in Norway to be pretty much what could be expected. Because of the fact that Belarusian is not a university study in the same sense that Russian or Polish is, the amount of research being conducted is down to the initiatives by individual researchers. Such initiatives exist, but they are not many.

BR: *What are the main academic institutions and scholars who deal with Belarus-related issues in Sweden/Norway and what are the main topics of their research?*

AK: Sweden does not have an academic center for Belarusian studies. Actually I have already mentioned all the researches who deal with Belarus-related issues in Sweden.

JŚ: There are same individual researchers, usually at the Slavic or Russian Studies at the Universities, publishing sometimes something concerning Belarus. I did it myself, even if I am not a researcher, rather a publicist. In 2012 I published a 32-pages booklet under a title Vitryssland – Europas sista diktatur in a the Swedish Institute of International Affairs' series Världspolitikens Dagsfrågor (World Policy's Daily Questions). This was our first (and probably the first in Swedish language) publication on the subject.

MP: I'm afraid I'm perhaps the only researcher in Norway conducting systematic research on topics related to Belarus. I have been particularly interested in Belarusian language culture and the development of the Belarusian standard language.

BR: *Why Belarusian issues draw so little attention in Swedish/Norwegian academia?*

AK: To the Swedish Belarus remains the most little known country of Europe. There are several reasons for this. First Belarus did not exist as a separate entity on the political map of Europe until 1991. The official name of the country in contemporary Swedish "Vitryssland" (White Russia) is wrong and does not contribute to the better understanding.

The Cold war separated Sweden and Swedish scholars from Belarus and its academic institutions. Despite geographical nearness of Belarus to Sweden, mentally and culturally people of Belarus and Swedes are far from each other.

As a result the contacts between Swedish and Belarusian scholars are minimal. Unfortunately history is still a "national science" and the majority of Swedish scholars focus on Sweden and Nordic countries. At the same time most of Belarusian historians deals with the history of native land and ne neighboring East European countries.

Most of Belarusian scholars do not speak English, which is basic for contemporary academic world. As a result Belarusian scientists could not be equal members of international projects and cooperate actively with Swedish colleagues. Many of Belarusian scholars have a poor knowledge of Western academia and the requirements for international scientific application.

JŚ: The situation reflexes the interest in Sweden in East European Countries. Belarus is considered as reflection of big Russia, both culturally and strategically. The trade between Sweden and Belarus is very limited. All that despite efforts of the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and his, together with his Polish counterpart, Radek Sikorski, EU-initiative, Eastern Partnership.

MP: I don't fully agree with the question. I don't think the situation is that bad. However, I would have liked to see more Norwegian-based research on the political and economic situation in Belarus. I believe this kind of research is necessary to provide our politicians with the background knowledge they need to improve our policies towards Belarus.

[1] See as example: Törnquist-Plewa, Barbara, "Remembering World War II in Belarus. A struggle between Competitive Historical Narratives", in: History, Language and Society in the Borderlands of Europe. Ukraine and Belarus in Focus. Ed. by Barbara Törnquist-Plewa. Malmö: Sekel, 2006, pp.33-60;.Törnquist-Plewa, Barbara & Nowak, Mattias, 'Vitryssland - en stat med många ansikten', Det nya Östeuropa: stat och nation i förändring., pp. 109-132, 2009.

FACTBOX

The facade of the only Lutheran church in Belarus (Hrodna) will be restored by June 2014. This is the only acting Lutheran church in Belarus. It was first mentioned in 1793 when King Stanislaw II presented the building of the former tavern to the Lutheran community. The church was almost destroyed during WWI and WWII. In 1993 the community of Hrodna Lutherans resumed the activity of the church.

Source: *BelTA,* February 18, 2014.

Special governmental working groups will work on a new program, Culture of Belarus, in 2014, Culture Minister Barys Sviatloŭ said. The state program will be based on the provisions for the creation of conditions to enhance economic efficiency of the cultural sphere through its modernization, infrastructure optimization, economic development of the national cultural industry, creation of conditions for the development of new financing models, and many more.

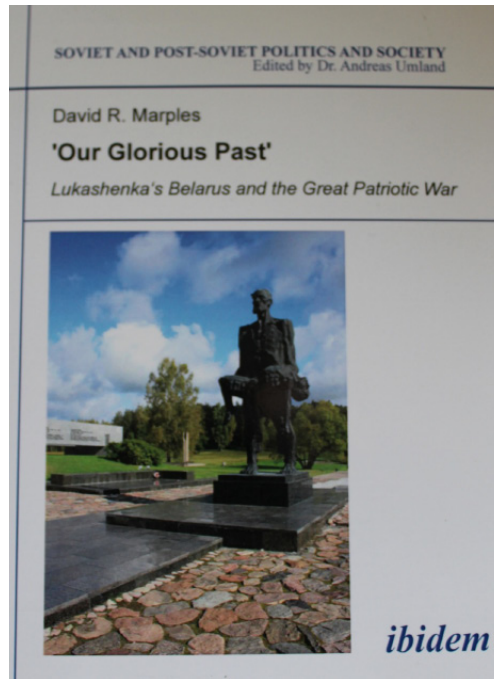
Source: *BelTA,* February 10, 2014.

The Sluck Local History Museum has announced it has acquired a Sluck belt, which is regarded Belarus' national historical and cultural treasure/ Until now there was not a single belt in Sluck. The double-sided belt woven from silk, silver and gold threads. was made by Sluck Manufactory between 1762 and 1780. The price was $90,000. The money was raised by local residents, businessmen and government organizations.

Source: *BelTA,* January 24, 2014.

NEW BOOKS

DAVID MARPLES ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK: LUKASHENKA IS THE ALLEGED INHERITOR OF THE MANTLE OF LIBERATOR



In his new book *"Our Glorious Past": Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2014) professor David R. Marples examines how the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka has used the Great Patriotic War as a key element in state ideology formation in Belarus. Belarusian Review asked the author to introduce the book to our readers.

Belarusian Review: *Why addressing the issue of the Great Patriotic War is so important for Belarus?*

David R. Marples: The war was without doubt an epochal event in the history of Belarus and one that affected every family. That is why it is important to examine that war in the Belarusian context. On the other hand, the war became the chief legitimizing agency of the Soviet state, particularly from the 1960s and 1970s when Victory Day became the most important event on the Soviet calendar. What Belarus has done, under its only president to date Aliaksandr Lukashenka, is first of all to elevate the war as the defining event of the Belarusian past, and second to modify the former Soviet version of events for a specifically Belarusian context. In this way, the years 1941-45 are linked directly to the

present: Lukashenka is the alleged inheritor of the mantle of liberator, and the president of Belarus owes his position today to the heroes who removed the "Fascist scourge" or "brown plague" from Europe. This interpretation achieves two purposes. It legitimizes a presidency that rests on control over society and information, as well as military and security forces; and it serves to negate other aspects of the history of Belarus that do not conform to the modified Soviet pattern. Taken at face value, it means that the present Republic of Belarus is a direct descendant of Soviet Belarus, and the Russian or Soviet "family," members of which fought alongside Belarusians for liberation. It is the defining event in modern identity formation and one that cannot be questioned, by historians or even by participants in the war. It is one that inflates losses, exaggerates and distorts victories, creates heroes (especially, but not only, partisans), and practically ignores the Jewish Holocaust on Belarusian territory. Above all it legitimizes the current regime and renders it the sole interpreter of the past, which I have long regarded as a dangerous phenomenon, and one that significantly distorts events.

BR: *Does the official interpretation of the war have any impact on the Belarusian society? If so, how it can be measured?*

DM: Yes it does. It can be measured in a number of ways: through opinion surveys, commemorative events like Victory Day and the official Independence Day, historic sites, museums, and monuments, all of which I examine in the book. Of course to some extent it is a manufactured memory used to create a new official national identity that legitimizes the Lukashenka presidency. Some scholars, like the late Vitali Silitski, argue that the entire concept is dependent on the patronage of the president, implying that without him—after his departure or death—it will die. I think that is a possibility, because within a few years, there will be no remaining veterans of the war. Official parades will need to rely on "post-memory" and textbooks. And although the regime has encouraged and promoted meetings between veterans and schoolchildren, their impact is difficult to assess. Youth today have such a variety of distractions that retention of oral interpretations presented in the schoolroom may be of short duration. I am inclined to think so.

BR: *Do the alternative interpretations of the war history have potential to compete with the state historical canon?*

DM: They lack such potential at the present time. As soon as they appear, the authorities react. Historians at state universities risk their careers if they offer alternative opinions or approaches to the war. Those who present alternative interpretations are labelled "historical revisionists," a term that has become as derogatory as fascism was during the war period itself. On the other hand, the state does not have a complete monopoly over public opinion. On the Internet and social networks, alternative views circulate and are discussed freely, including among Belarusians who live or study outside state boundaries. Moreover, the period is one that continues to fascinate historians in a number of centres, not only in the West, but also places like Ukraine where there have been extensive debates for at least a decade. Andrej Dynko looked at some questions a couple of years ago in Naša Niva, without really challenging the status quo. I cite in the book the lengthy series in Narodnaja Volia by Illia Kopyl, which I think is somewhat flawed, but nonetheless makes some penetrating points regarding the activities of the Partisans. I am sure you recall that the newspaper received an official warning for publishing these articles and was picketed by veterans, most of which looked rather young to have been participants in the war.

BR: *After so many years of historical ideologization, how long will it take Belarusian people to accept and comprehend real historical facts about the war?*

DM: It is worrying though that such a narrow approach prevails – the longer it is in place, the more difficult it will be to offer more accurate accounts of the war years, one of the most tragic periods in the history of Belarus. Much depends of course on who follows Lukashenka, and whether the concept of an all-powerful presidency is retained, or whether Belarus will once again adhere to the concepts of the original 1994 Constitution. Changes of attitude must start in schools, which means that textbooks would need to change, as would the attitudes of teachers. For those over sixty, I think it will be a difficult process to change the prevalent mind-set, because it is deeply entrenched. It is doubly difficult because without doubt the occupation was one during which Belarusians suffered incredible losses and hardship. Thus one has to change thinking on two levels: the admission that the liberators may not have brought liberation; and that the Belarusian version of the war years is as mythical as was the old Soviet version – in some respects more so. In particular the story of the Brest Fortress, of the initial Soviet invasion, and fighting later in 1941, which offers the view that essentially resistance in Belarus "saved" Moscow seems particularly problematic. The story of the debate around 1941 is the subject of a new book by the British historian Polly Jones, but the Belarusian version is worth telling in its own right.

BR: *How could you describe your book in one sentence to attract its potential reader?*

DM: The book examines the Lukashenka regime's attempt at nation building and the creation of national identity in Belarus through the Great Patriotic War, focusing on official narratives, heroes, veterans, historic sites, museums, films, and documentaries, and with special focus on the years 2008-10.

Interview conducted by *Kiryl Kascian*



MEMORY AND TIME: A TRIBUTE TO THE PERISHED AND THE WORRY ABOUT CURRENT GENERATIONS

LEONID SMILOVITSKY

The book was prepared within the framework of the joint project of the Public Association "Republican Fund Holocaust", Jewish cultural centre "Mishpocha" (Viciebsk), and Museum of history and culture of Jews in Belarus (Minsk). Compilers: V.N. Akopyan, E.M. Kirilchenko, Y.M. Murakhovsky, M.A. Treister, A.L.Shulman. – Minsk: Medisont, 2013, 460 pp.

The publication was made possible thanks to the efforts of prematurely departed Leonid N. Valyaev. There remains a bright memory of him, and the selfless assistance of CJSC „KorpKonsalt", JSC „Belsporttehnika" and personally Oleg V. Kaufman; Group „A-100" and personally Alexander L. Tsenter.

This book was prepared on eve of the tragic date — the 70th anniversary of the destruction of the Minsk ghetto. The Minsk ghetto has long become a symbol of the Holocaust of Belarus Jewry. It was the largest ghetto (with about 100,000 prisoners) on the USSR territory within the country's 1939 borders. The Minsk ghetto existed longer than many others and was one of the last to be destroyed. The execution of the last 10,000 prisoners who remained in the ghetto was accelerated by the assassination of Wilhelm Kube, the Commissioner General Commissar of White Ruthenia (Belarus), at the end of October 1943. This operation was conducted on Stalin's order by an intelligence Group of the Soviet NKVD (security forces) with active participation of Belarusian partisans. At the same time no one wanted to pay attention to how it would be reflected in the fate of the ghetto, although consequences were predictable.

The volume is dedicated to Belarus and the tragedy of its inhabitants. The tragedy of Belarus' Jews is a part of the horrible atrocities committed by Nazis against Jews of Eastern Europe.

Due to its geopolitical location Belarus occupies a special place in Europe. The country is situated at the intersection of major roads from West to East, and from North to South. No invader intending to reach Russia could bypass Belarus. However, only the German Nazis decided to solve the issue in their own way by appealing to Anti-Semitism. They declared Jews as the cause of virtually all misfortunes of mankind. Hitler's followers called Soviet Jews „Judeo-bolsheviks" and „Stalin's helpers".

Belarus became the first Soviet republic subject to pressure of the German war machine. Belarusian Jews were the first victim of the policy of total elimination. It was precisely in Belarus where the Nazis first tested their mechanism of mass murder.

The history of Belarusian Jews who survived the Holocaust, is full not only of horrible stories about actions of special punitive troops (*Einsatzgruppen*), and about the structure of more than 300 ghettos and concentration camps, where prisoners were humiliated, starved, made to ruin their health by performing backbreaking work. They were also made to quarrel with each other; Belarusians were incited against Jews by promises of distributing property of the convicted.

Less known is another, heroic page of people's tragedy. The Jews took the most active part in Belarus' Resistance, which until the summer of 1942 Nazis considered Jewish — not without reason (most first partisans were Communists, Party functionaries, war prisoners, and Jews).

With creation of the Belarusian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement in September 1942, Jews fleeing from ghetto complemented a number of Belarusian partisan units. They participated in combat operations, in the „rail war," ambushes, performed agency tasks and propaganda work, collected intelligence information. They served as physicians, weapons and wireless operators, prepared foods, worked in partisan laundries, shoemaker and tailor shops, cared for the wounded. The Jewish family camps and units in Belarus forests became another form of this struggle; they had no analogues in other occupied countries of Europe.

The name of the book is deeply symbolic: *MEMORY and TIME.* A human being differs from all other beings living on Earth precisely by his ability to remember. This virtue was given to him by nature and is fixed by natural selection. It may be enough to deny the memory (or lose it), and the mankind is thrown far back. Time erases memory. It is a special protective mechanism preserving the human brain from being overloaded by emotions, bitter experiences, disappointments, failures and losses. However, it is

enough to let this process to run its own course, to observe that all mistakes and miscalculations of the human strain are being repeated. We have no right to let the next human generation lose memory about the Holocaust tragedy.

After seven decades the historical and political attitudes changed; much became known, odious prohibitions disappeared. The world itself changed. Some states collapsed, and new ones arose. In the post-Soviet space historians, journalists, teachers and politicians stopped being afraid to pronounce the word Jew.

What needs does this book serve? To whom is it addressed? Why does the Jewish tragedy during the Second World War continue to touch human souls? Why is it necessary to continue this discussion?

Each new generation that enters life, raises its questions. Why precisely did Jews become the target of Nazi racial policy? How could it happen? How were mass murders of Jews reflected on fates of other European peoples? How did the Jews' neighbors behave: who helped to survive, and who betrayed? Did the Jews become humble victims or participants of the Resistance? Why was the topic of the Holocaust transferred into oblivion for more than half a century in the Soviet Union, why was it actually prohibited? No articles were written, no books published, no dissertations defended, no plays produced, movie industry was silent. Germans killed the Jews, and soon after the war in the Soviet Union it became impossible to talk and write about it. How can it be explained?

Why did the Soviet authority hurry to accuse anyone interested in this issue of Jewish nationalism, and label him an anti-patriot? Answers to these questions are known to people who will tell the truth in pages of this book. Let us listen to their stories, contemplate their examples; this way we will try to see and understand their logic.

This book was selected according to the principle of preserving people's memory. This time, as conceived by members of the editorial staff, scholars yielded place to people of various professions who in their own experience encountered the policies of the Nazi genocide. The volume does not contain one accidental author.

The reader is lucky to touch on recollections and testimonies of the Holocaust witnesses and members of their families, participants of the armed resistance. The book Memory and Time consists of the introduction, five chapters, and conclusion. Lev Stelman tells about the beginning of the war. The situation in the ghetto is depicted by Nelly Gerbovitskaya, Josif Graifer, Roman Gurevich, Mikhail Nordstein, Sima Margolina, Jakov Kravchinsky. The underground within ghetto is portrayed by Sofia Sadovskaya. The fate of those who dared to challenge fate and at great risk fled the ghetto to join partisans is described by Mikhail Treister, Pavel Rubinchik, Saveli Kaplinsky. Galina Davydova, Leonid Rubinstein and Naum Kheifets wrote about the incredible ordeals and the fight for life in the ghetto and in concentration camps.

The tragedy of the Minsk and all other Belarus' ghettos hurts until today. Its signs in form of monuments and memorials, brotherly graves and graves with undefined names of innocent victims are strewn all over the country's territory.

The more we learn about the Jewish tragedy during the Second World War, the less we reconcile with those who consider this terrible misfortune a temporary and accidental phenomenon, remote from today's problems.

To remember the Holocaust, to know its scale, and understand its causes - is not only a tribute to the perished, but also the worry about current generations, in hope that it will not ever be repeated.

Author: Dr. *Leonid Smilovitsky,* chief researcher, the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora research Center, Tel Aviv University.

HISTORICAL DATA

March 25, 1918 - Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) was proclaimed.

March 18, 1921 - The Polish-Soviet Treaty of Riga was signed; Belarus was divided nearly in half between Poland and Soviet Russia.

March 15, 1994 - Constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted.

March 7, 1931 - Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BELTA) was established.

March 6, 1990 - World Association of Belarusians „Baćkaŭščyna" was established.

March 3, 1067 - Battle on the Niamiha River took place; it is associated with the first documented mentioning of Minsk.

FACTBOX

Mahilioŭ Region will allocate Br3.4 billion for the restoration of Bychaŭ Castle. In accordance with the design and estimate documentation, this year work will continue on the conservation of the castle and reconstruction of the two towers. Work on Bychaŭ Castle was commenced last year, in accordance with the state program "Castles of Belarus". Over Br2.5 billion was assigned for this purpose from the national and local budgets. The Bychaŭ Castle reconstruction and renovation project is slated for completion in 2018. The castle is only a part of the Fortress fortifications. The fortress compound, which is recognized as the national heritage site, also includes the synagogue and the territory of the former Roman-Catholic church. Built in the 17th century the synagogue is in decay and will be also renovated. This year the conservation of the synagogue will be completed The castle was built in the early 17th century by Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Jan Karal Chadkievič. In the 1990s the remaining buildings were turned into a woodworking shop, but after a fire in August 2004 the castle was abandoned.

Source: *BelTA,* February 18, 2014.

SPORTS

BELARUS AT THE 2014 WINTER OLYMPICS IN SOCHI



Team Belarus finished the 22nd Olympic Games in Sochi in the 8th place, reads an unofficial team ranking. With five gold medals, Belarus have made these Olympics the most successful since the country's independence in 1991. The previous record was set at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games when Belarus won four gold medals. Belarus' 26-strong delegation was one of the smallest in the history of its participation in the Olympics.

Darya Domracheva, 27, was of course one of the heroes of the Olympics. After 9th place in the sprint she won the pursuit, the mass start and the individual race. After this Darya Domracheva was deservedly awarded the Hero of Belarus title. Apart from her, it was Nadezhda Skardino who won 15km individual bronze.

Belarus cemented its status as the dominant nation in the aerial skiing after victories of Alla Tsuper and Anton Kushnir. It all would not have happened without coach Mikalai Kazeka whose charges have won medals at every Winter Olympics since 1998. At the 1998 Games in Nagano aerialist Dzmitry Dashchynski claimed bronze. In Salt Lake City bronze was bagged by Alexei Grishin and in 2006 Dzmitry Dashchynski improved his result by wining silver. Kazeka's efforts were rewarded once again at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics when Alexei Grishin won Belarus' first ever gold at Winter Olympics. Everyone pinned hopes on Alexei Grishin in Sochi but he failed to succeed in the qualifying. However, it was other Belarusian freestyle skiers' turn to prove their worth. Alla Tsuper, 34, who resumed career after giving birth to a daughter, produced a stunning performance to win aerial skiing gold. But that was not the end. In several days another Belarusian aerialist Anton Kushnir bagged gold in the final after a well-executed back double full-full-double full, one of the most difficult jumps in this sport.

Russia took first place in the unofficial medal ranking with 33 medals (13 gold, 11 silver and nine bronze). Norway were second with 26 medals (11, 5, 10) and Canada third with 25 awards (10, 10, 5). All in all, 2,800 athletes from 88 countries took part in the Winter Olympics which featured 98 medal events.

These were the 11th Olympics for Belarus in the country's independent history (five Summer and six Winter Olympics). At five previous Winter Olympics Belarus won nine medals (one gold, four silver and four bronze medals).

"The results speak for themselves. The Sochi Olympics has become the most successful games in the history of sovereign Belarus. This is more than a decent result, which came due to the efforts of the athletes, coaches, and the state as a whole," Belarusian Minister of Sport and Tourism Alexander Shamko stressed. Alexander Shamko is sure that such a high result will give a new impetus to the development of physical training and sports in Belarus. "It is all about the attitude to sport. The success of our athletes will motivate the younger generation, and as a result we will have a healthier nation," the minister said.

Belarusian users of the search engine Yandex made over 215,000 queries about medal winners of the Belarusian Olympic team during one week from 10 to 16 February. After the success in Sochi the number of queries about the Olympians went up over 30 times

Source: *BelTA (belta.by).*

THE END OF HC DYNAMA MINSK



The crisis in Belarusian champion HC Dynama Minsk has culminated in the end of February 2014. The club, which for several seasons has been considered as a national project of Belarus with a budget of around 4.000.000 euros, has decided to withdraw from the Belarusian championship. The financial crisis threatened to the club's survival and it has been clear that Dynama Minsk is not going to be able to function in this form.

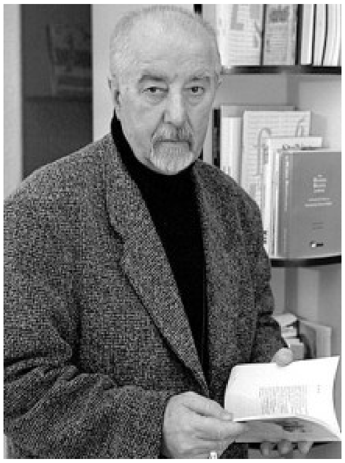
The club announced that all its players become free agents immediatelly and that club starts with the process of liquidation! Dynama's sports director Andrei Parashchanka said for pressball.by that all the players got status of free agents:

- They are free to seek other options for continuing careers. We will do everything possible to cover wage arrears accumulated since the beginning of the year. Technical staff will be reduced to the number required to complete the liquidation of the club operations.

Dynama managed to finish fifth in the Preliminary Group with Barcelona, PSG, Vardar and Metalurg Skopje, what is the result under the level of ambition of team with many foreign players coached by Slovenian national team coach Boris Denic. The team also withdrew from participation in domestic Belarusian championship. The second team of Dynama Minsk, which was part of the second Belarusian League, also stopped with their matches.

Sources: *handball-planet.com, rkmetalurg.mk.*

IN MEMORIAM



Thousands of Belarusians have gathered in Minsk to bid farewell to prominent poet Ryhor Baradulin. Baradulin was the last Belarusian poet to be awarded the title of the "people's poet," the highest such title in Soviet Belarus, in 1992. He died on March 2 at the age of 79. Baradulin was also known as a prominent translator of international literature into Belarusian. He published around 70 books of poetry, including satiric and children's poems, as well as articles and essays. Baradulin was nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006.

Baradulin along with Bykaŭ kept our language at the top European artistic level. He together with Bykaŭ created the Belarusian Popular Front. Baradulin together with Bykaŭ went with us to Kurapaty. He together with Bykaŭ supported us in the decisive 1991, in 1994 he and Bykaŭ were trusted by Zianon Paźniak. In 1996, the year most difficult for Paźniak and me, his and Bykaŭ's support was priceless to us. Baradulin is now forever with Bykaŭ, whose closest friend he had been during his life – but in the best world. Baradulin is now along with Bahdanovič, Kupala, Kolas. With Luckievič, with Kalinoŭski, with Skaryna – there are quite a few people of this magnitude, but these people then and now keep our Belarusian spirit and our national greatness.

Siarhiej Navumčyk (deputy of Belarus' Supreme Council, and coordinator of the BNF parliamentary opposition; 1st Vice-President of the BNR Rada Executive Council), March 2, 2014.

Unfortunately, it turned out that I do not have strength and health to talk about this terrible news. The poet unique for Belarus and not only for Belarus departed. He was the last poet of unearthly beauty. Natural, strongly Belarusian. Poet of such power that I cannot even talk about his greatness, because it will be determined by time. But we were blessed by God to have this genius, magician, clairvoyant. It is very rare that poets of such power are occurring. But it was happiness that it did. Dear Ryhor, you are with us. We breathe with you. Live with you. You will live along with Janka Kupala, Maksim Bahdanovič,, Vasil Bykaŭ. I do not want and cannot speak "lived." I have no right. It had no right to happen what happened to you. You are with us.

Hienadź Buraŭkin (Belarusian poet, journalist, and diplomat, in 1990-1994 Ambassador of Belarus to the UN(, March 2, 2014.

Sources: *RFE/RL, Facebook.*

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